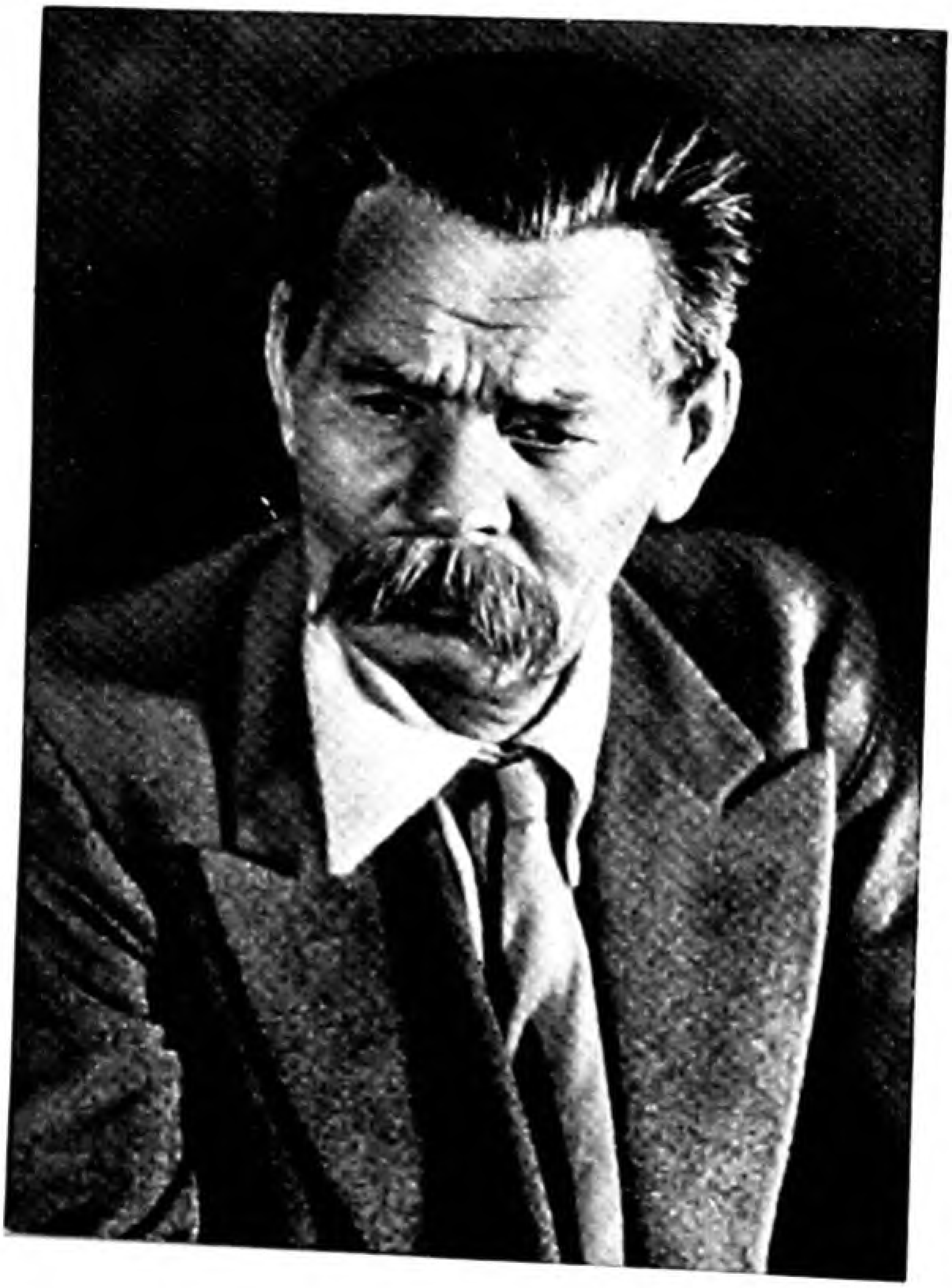
LIBRARY OF SELECTED SOVIET LITERATURE

M. GORKY

MOTHER

☆



М. Горький

М. ГОРЬКИЙ

МАТЬ

Повесть
в 2-х частях

2-е издание

1955

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

Care

M. GORKY

MOTHER

A Novel
in Two Parts

2nd Edition

DONATED BY
Prof. M. K. Khera
SD-121, PITAM PURA,
Delhi-88, 27344723

1955
FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY MARGARET WETTLIN

Allama Iqbal Library
531908

23
65 MCN

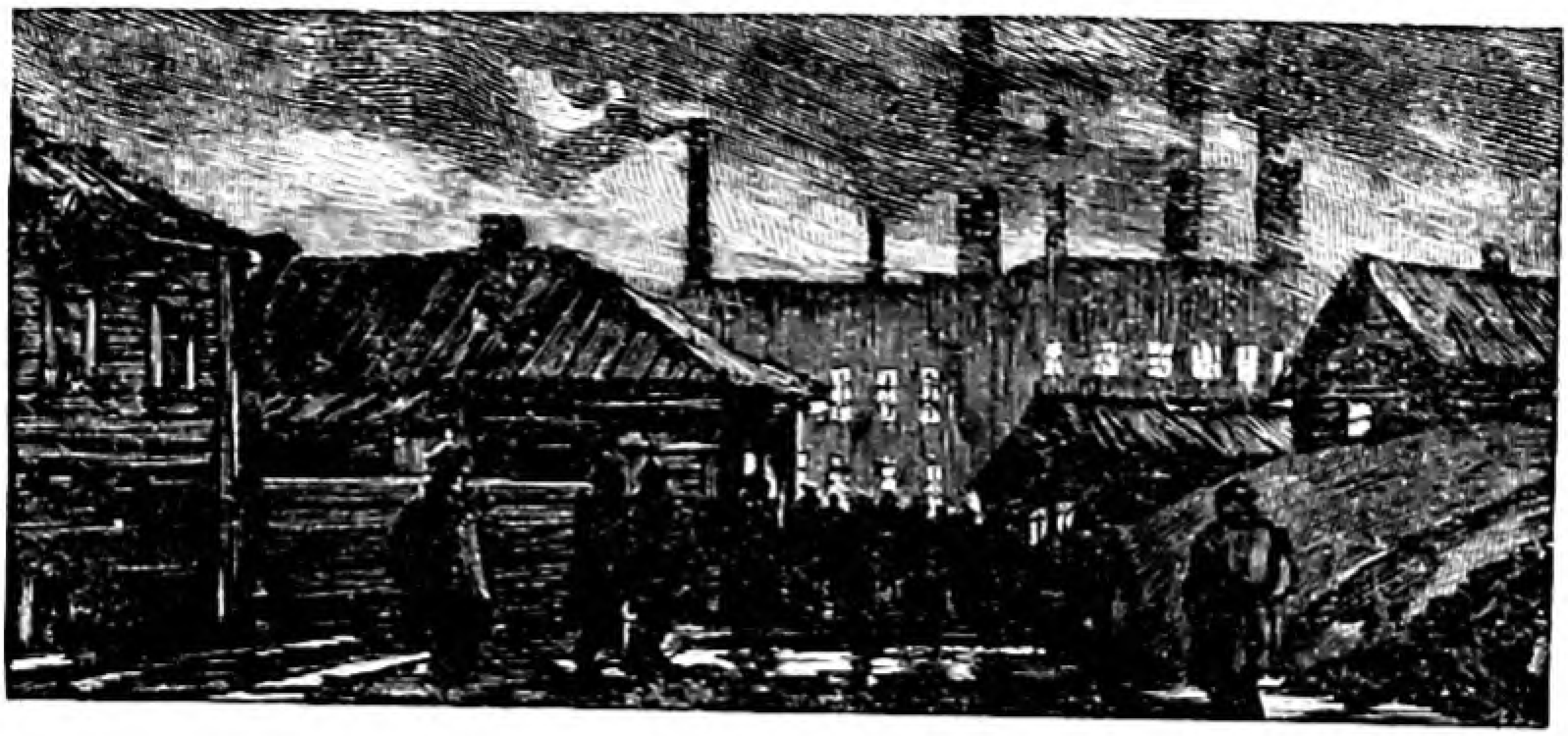
ILLUSTRATIONS
BY KUKRYNIKSY

DESIGNED
BY E. KOGAN

Cat

UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
531908
14.6.07

PART ONE



I

Every day the factory whistle shrieked tremulously in the grimy, greasy air above the workers' settlement. And in obedience to its summons sullen people, roused before sleep had refreshed their muscles, came scuttling out of their little grey houses like frightened cockroaches. They walked through the cold darkness, down the unpaved street to the high stone cells of the factory, which awaited them with cold complacency, its dozens of square oily eyes lighting up the road. The mud smacked beneath their feet. They shouted in hoarse sleepy voices and rent the air with ugly oaths, while other sounds came floating to meet them: the heavy hum of machinery and the hiss of steam. Tall black smokestacks, stern and gloomy, loomed like thick clubs above the settlement.

In the evening, when the setting sun found weary reflection in the windows of the houses, the factory expelled the people from its stone bowels as though they were so much slag, and they climbed the street again—grimy, black-faced, their hungry teeth glittering, their bodies giving off the sticky odour of machine oil. Now their voices were lively

DONATED BY
Prof. M. K. Khera

even joyful, for work was over for another day, and supper and rest awaited them at home.

The day had been devoured by the factory, whose machines sucked up as much of the workers' strength as they needed. The day was struck out, leaving not a trace, and Man had advanced one more step towards his grave. But now he was looking forward to rest and to the delights of a smoke-filled tavern, and he was content.

On Sundays and holidays the people slept till ten, and then the respectable married ones put on their best clothes and went to mass, scolding the young ones for their indifference to religion. After mass they came home, ate *pirogi* and slept again until evening.

The weariness accumulated through the years dulled their appetites, so they whetted them with drink, stimulating their stomachs with the sharp sting of vodka.

In the evening they strolled along the streets. Those who owned galoshes put them on even though the ground was dry, and those who owned umbrellas carried them even though the weather was fine.

On meeting their friends they talked about the factory, the machines and their foremen; they never thought or talked about anything not connected with their work. Occasional sparks of feeble faltering thoughts sometimes flickered in the dull monotony of their days. When the men came home they wrangled with their wives and often beat them. The young people went to the taverns or to their friends' houses, where they played the accordion, sang ribald songs, danced, swore and got drunk. Worn out as they were by hard work, the drink quickly went to their heads, and some unaccountable irritation rankled in their breasts, demanding an outlet. And so they seized the slightest opportunity to relieve their feelings by flying at one another with bestial ferocity. Bloody fights were the result. Sometimes they ended in serious injuries and occasionally in killings.

Their human relations were dominated by a lurking sense of animosity, a feeling as old as the incurable exhaustion of their muscles. People were born with this malady of the spirit inherited from their fathers, and like a dark shadow it accompanied them to the very grave, making them do things revolting in their senseless cruelty.

On Sundays the young people came home late at night in torn clothes, covered with dirt and mud, with black eyes and bloody noses, sometimes boasting maliciously of the blows they had dealt their friends, at other times sulking, raging or crying over their insults; they were drunk and pathetic, miserable and disgusting. Often mothers or fathers found their sons sprawling dead drunk in the shadow of a fence, or on the floor of a tavern. The elders would curse them foully, pummel their vodka-sodden bodies, bring them home and put them to bed with a certain solicitude, only to wake them up early in the morning when the shriek of the whistle came rushing in a dark stream through the dawn.

They cursed their children and beat them mercilessly, but the fighting and drinking of young people was taken as a matter of course; when the fathers had been young they too had fought and drunk, been thrashed in their turn by their mothers and fathers. Life had always been like that. It flowed on in a turbid stream, slowly and evenly, year after year, and everything was bound together by deep-rooted habits of thinking and doing the same thing day after day.

Sometimes new people came to live in the factory settlement. At first they attracted attention just because they were newcomers, then a superficial interest in them was sustained by their accounts of the other places where they had worked. But soon the novelty wore off, people grew used to them and stopped noticing them. From what the newcomers said it was clear that the life of working people was the same everywhere. And if this was true, what was there to talk about?

But some of the newcomers said things that were new to the settlement. Nobody argued with them, but they listened sceptically. Some were annoyed by what they said, others were vaguely alarmed, while yet others were disturbed by a faint shadow of hope, and this made them drink all the harder to drive away alarms that only made life more complicated.

If they noted anything unusual about a newcomer, the people in the settlement would hold it against him, and they were wary of anyone who was not like themselves. It was as if they feared he might upset the dull regularity of their lives, which, if difficult, were at least untroubled. People were used to having life bear down upon them with equal pressure at all times, and since they had no hope of relief, they were sure any change would only increase their hardships.

The working people silently avoided anyone who voiced new ideas. So the newcomers usually went away. In the rare cases when they stayed, they either grew to be like their fellows or took to living apart. . . .

After some fifty years of such a life a man died.

II

Thus lived Mikhail Vlassov, a sullen, hirsute mechanic with tiny eyes that glared suspiciously and with spiteful scorn from under his bushy eyebrows. He was the best mechanic at the factory and the strongest man in the settlement, but he was surly with his superiors, and for that reason made little money. On every holiday he beat somebody, and so he was disliked and feared by all. Any attempt to pay him back in kind proved futile. Whenever Vlassov saw people making for him, he would pick up a stone or a board, or an iron bar, plant his feet wide apart, and silently wait for the enemy. The sight of his hairy arms and his face, overgrown from eyes to neck with a thick black beard, was enough to terrify anyone. But people were especially afraid of his eyes—little and sharp, they seemed to bore through a person, and anyone who met their gaze felt he was in the presence of a wild force ready to strike without fear or mercy.

"Well, take yourselves off, you sons of bitches," he would say gruffly, his large yellow teeth glinting through his beard. And the people would take themselves off, hurling a volley of cowardly oaths as they went.

"Sons of bitches!" he would call after them, his eyes sharp as a stiletto with scorn. Then he would follow them, his head thrown back, shouting defiantly:

"Well, who wants to die?"

Nobody did.

He rarely spoke, and "son of a bitch" was his favourite epithet. He used it for the police, and officials, and his bosses at the factory. He always called his wife a bitch.

"Here, can't you see my pants are ripped, you bitch?"

When his son Pavel was fourteen years old, he once attempted to grab him by the hair. Pavel picked up a heavy hammer and said curtly:

"Hands off!"

"What's that?" asked his father, gliding towards his tall slender son as the shadow of a cloud glides towards a birch tree.

"I've had enough," said Pavel. "I won't take any more." And he raised the hammer.

His father gave him one look and hid his hairy hands behind his back.

"All right," he said with a short laugh; then, with a deep sigh: "You're a son of a bitch all right."

Shortly after that he said to his wife:

"Don't ask me for any more money. Pavel'll feed you from now on."

"And you'll drink up all your wages, I suppose?" she dared to retort.

"That's none of your business, you bitch! I'll go get myself a girl if I like!"

He did not get himself a girl, but from that time on until his death, nearly two years later, he took no notice of his son and never spoke to him.

He had a dog as big and shaggy as himself. It followed him to the factory every morning and waited for him at the gate every evening. Vlassov spent his holidays going from one tavern to another. He went without speaking, searching people's faces as though looking for someone. And the dog trailed its bushy tail after its master all day long. When Vlassov came home drunk, he would sit down to supper and feed the dog from his own bowl. He never cursed it or beat it, but he never fondled it either. After supper he would throw the dishes on the floor if his wife were slow in clearing the table; then he would place a bottle of vodka in front of him, lean his back against the wall, close his eyes, open wide his mouth, and wail a mournful song. The doleful, ugly sounds became entangled in his whiskers, pushing out the bread crumbs; the mechanic would stroke his beard and moustache with his thick fingers as he sang. The words of his song were vague and straggling, and the melody reminded one of the howling of wolves in winter. He would sing as long as the vodka lasted, then slump over on the bench or drop his head on the table and sleep until the whistle blew. The dog lay beside him.

He died of a rupture. For five days he tossed in his bed, black in the face, his eyes closed, grinding his teeth. Occasionally he would say to his wife:

"Give me some arsenic . . . poison me. . . ."

The doctor ordered a poultice, but added that Mikhail must undergo an operation and should be taken to the hospital that very day.

"To hell with you! I'll die without your help, you son of a bitch!" gasped Mikhail.

When the doctor left and his wife tearfully implored him to have the operation, he shook his fist at her and said:

"If I get well it will go all the worse with you!"

He died in the morning, just as the whistle was blowing. He lay in his coffin with his mouth open and his brows drawn in a scowl of displeasure. He was buried by his wife, his son, his dog, Danilo Vesovshchikov (an old thief and drunkard who had been dismissed from the factory) and a few beggars from the settlement. His wife wept little and very quietly. Pavel did not weep at all. The people from the settlement who met the little funeral procession stopped and crossed themselves:

"Pelagea must be dreadful glad he's gone," they said.

"Died like the dog he was," said others.

The people went away when the coffin was buried, but the dog remained sitting on the fresh earth, silently sniffing the grave. A few days later somebody killed it. . . .

III

On a Sunday two weeks after the death of his father, Pavel Vlassov came home dead drunk. He staggered into the house and crawled into the seat at the head of the table, striking the board with his fist as his father had done and shouting to his mother:

"Supper!"

His mother sat down next to her son, put her arms about him, and pulled his head down to her breast. But he held her off.

"Come, Mother! Be quick!"

"Foolish boy," said his mother sadly and affectionately as she removed his hand.

"And I'm gonna smoke! Gimme pa's pipe," muttered Pavel, moving his thick tongue with difficulty.

This was the first time he had ever been drunk. The vodka weakened his body but did not blot out consciousness, and inside his head throbbed the question:

"Am I drunk? Am I drunk?"

He was embarrassed by his mother's gentleness and touched by the grief in her eyes. He felt like crying and kept back the tears by pretending to be drunker than he really was.

His mother stroked his damp, tousled hair.

"You shouldn't have done this," she said quietly.

He began to feel sick. After a severe attack of vomiting his mother put him to bed and placed a wet towel on his pale brow. This sobered him somewhat, but his head was still going round and his eyelids were too heavy to lift. With that ugly brown taste in his mouth he peered through his lashes at his mother's large face and thought:

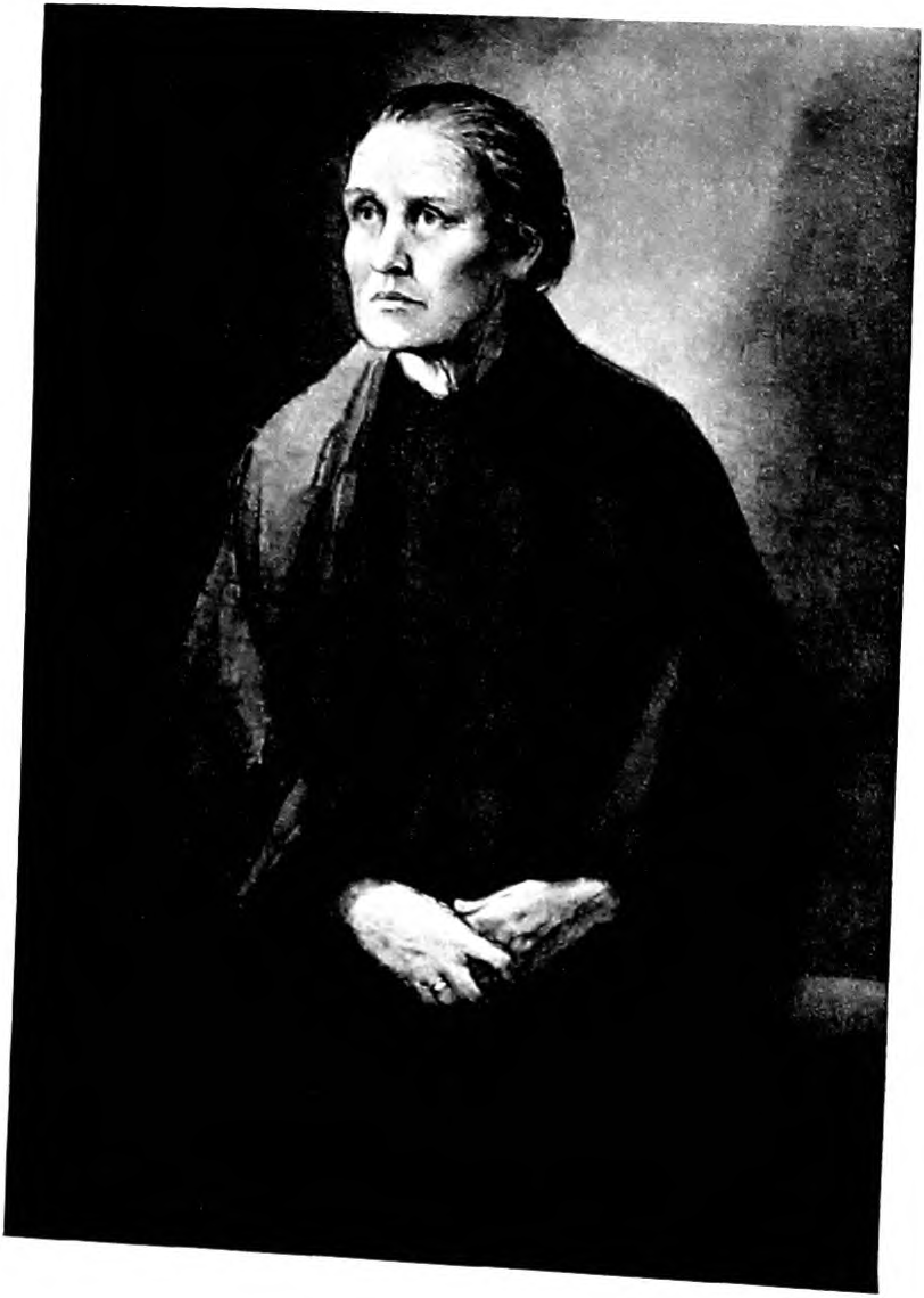
"I guess I'm still too young. Others drink and nothing happens, but I get sick. . . ."

From somewhere far away came his mother's soft voice:

"How are you going to support me if you start drinking?"

"Everybody drinks," he replied, closing his eyes tightly.

His mother sighed. He was right. She herself knew that



the tavern was the only place where people could squeeze out a drop of happiness.

"But you mustn't," she said. "Your father drank more than enough for both of you. Didn't I suffer enough at his hands? Couldn't you take a little pity on your mother?"

As he listened to the soft sad words, Pavel realized he had scarcely been aware of his mother's existence during his father's lifetime, so silent had she been, so fearful of being beaten. He himself had stayed away from home as much as possible to avoid meeting his father, and so he had grown apart from his mother. Now, as he gradually sobered, he watched her intently.

She was tall and somewhat stooped. Her body, broken by hard work and the beatings of her husband, moved noiselessly and a bit sidewise,as though she were afraid of knocking into something. Her wide oval face, puffy and wrinkled, was lighted by dark eyes filled with fear and grief, like the eyes of most of the women in the settlement. Above her right eyebrow was a deep scar, slightly lifting the eyebrow and creating the impression that her right ear was higher than her left; this gave her face the expression of one who is always anxiously on the alert. Streaks of white shone in her thick dark hair. She was all softness and sadness and submissiveness. . . .

Down her cheeks stole slow tears.

"Don't cry," said her son quietly. "Give me a drink."

"I'll bring you some ice water."

But when she came back he was asleep. She stood looking down at him for a minute with the dipper trembling in her hand, the ice striking against the tin. Then she placed it on the table and silently sank to her knees before the holy images. Against the window beat the sounds of the drunken life outside. An accordion wheezed in the damp darkness of the autumn evening; someone sang in a raucous tone; someone else let out a string of filthy oaths; there was the disturbing sound of women's tired irritated voices. . . .

The life in the Vlassovs' little house flowed on more calmly and quietly than before, and somewhat differently than in the other houses. Theirs stood at the edge of the settlement, above a steep if not very high embankment leading down to the swamp. One-third of the house was taken up by the kitchen and a little room partitioned off in which the mother slept. The remaining two-thirds formed a square room with two windows in it. One corner was filled by Pavel's bed, another by a table and two benches. The rest of the furnishings consisted of a few chairs, a dresser with a little mirror on it, a trunk with clothes in it, a clock on the wall and two icons in the corner.

Pavel did all that was expected of a young man; he bought himself an accordion, a shirt with a starched front, a bright necktie, galoshes and a cane. In this way he became like all the other boys of his age. He went to parties in the evening, learned to dance quadrilles and the polka, and came home drunk on Sundays. But vodka always made him sick. On Monday mornings he would wake up with a headache and heartburn, his face pale and haggard.

"Did you have a good time last night?" his mother once asked him.

"Beastly!" he answered with sullen vexation. "Next time I'll go fishing. Or maybe I'll buy myself a gun and go hunting."

He worked diligently, without missing a day or being fined for lateness. He was a taciturn boy, and there was discontentment in his large blue eyes, so like his mother's. He did not buy himself a gun or go fishing, but soon it became clear that he was diverging from the path everyone else trod. He went less often to parties, and while he disappeared on Sundays, he always came home sober. His mother's sharp eye saw that her son's face was growing thinner, his eyes more serious, and his lips compressed into a tight, stern line. He must be nursing some grievance, or perhaps he was being wasted by illness. Formerly his friends had often dropped in to see him; now, finding him rarely at home, they stopped coming. His mother was glad her son was not like the rest of the young people at the factory, but vague fears stirred within her as she saw the stubborn efforts he was making to steer his course away from the dark stream of the common life.

"Are you sure you feel all right, Pasha?" she would sometimes ask him.

"Quite," he would answer.

"You're so thin!" she would say with a sigh.

He began bringing books home. He would read them surreptitiously and always hide them when he had finished. Sometimes he would copy out a passage and hide the paper.

They saw very little of each other, and almost never spoke together. In the morning he would drink his tea in silence and go straight to work, returning for dinner at noon. Only the most casual remarks were passed at the dinner table, and when the meal was over he disappeared again until evening. In the evening he washed, ate his supper, then sat down with a book. On Sundays he left the house in the morning and returned late at night. She knew that he went to town and sometimes attended the theatre, but no one from town ever came to see him. It seemed to her that he talked less and less, yet at the same time she noticed that he used new words which she could not understand, while the rough expressions he had formerly used dropped out of his speech. Many new details of his behaviour drew her attention: he stopped dressing foppishly and began to give more care to the cleanliness of his body and clothing. His movements became freer, his manners simpler and less gruff. She was worried by these inexplicable changes. He behaved differently with her too: sometimes he would sweep the floor, he always made his bed on Sundays and tried in every way to help her with her work. Nobody else in the settlement ever did that.

One day he brought home a picture and hung it on the wall. It showed three people deep in conversation as they walked down a road.

"The resurrected Christ on his way to Emmaus," explained Pavel.

The picture pleased his mother, but she thought, "Why doesn't he ever go to church if he's so fond of Christ?"

The number of books grew on the attractive shelves built by a carpenter with whom Pavel was friendly. The room took on a cosy look.

He usually called her "mother," but sometimes he would address her more affectionately:

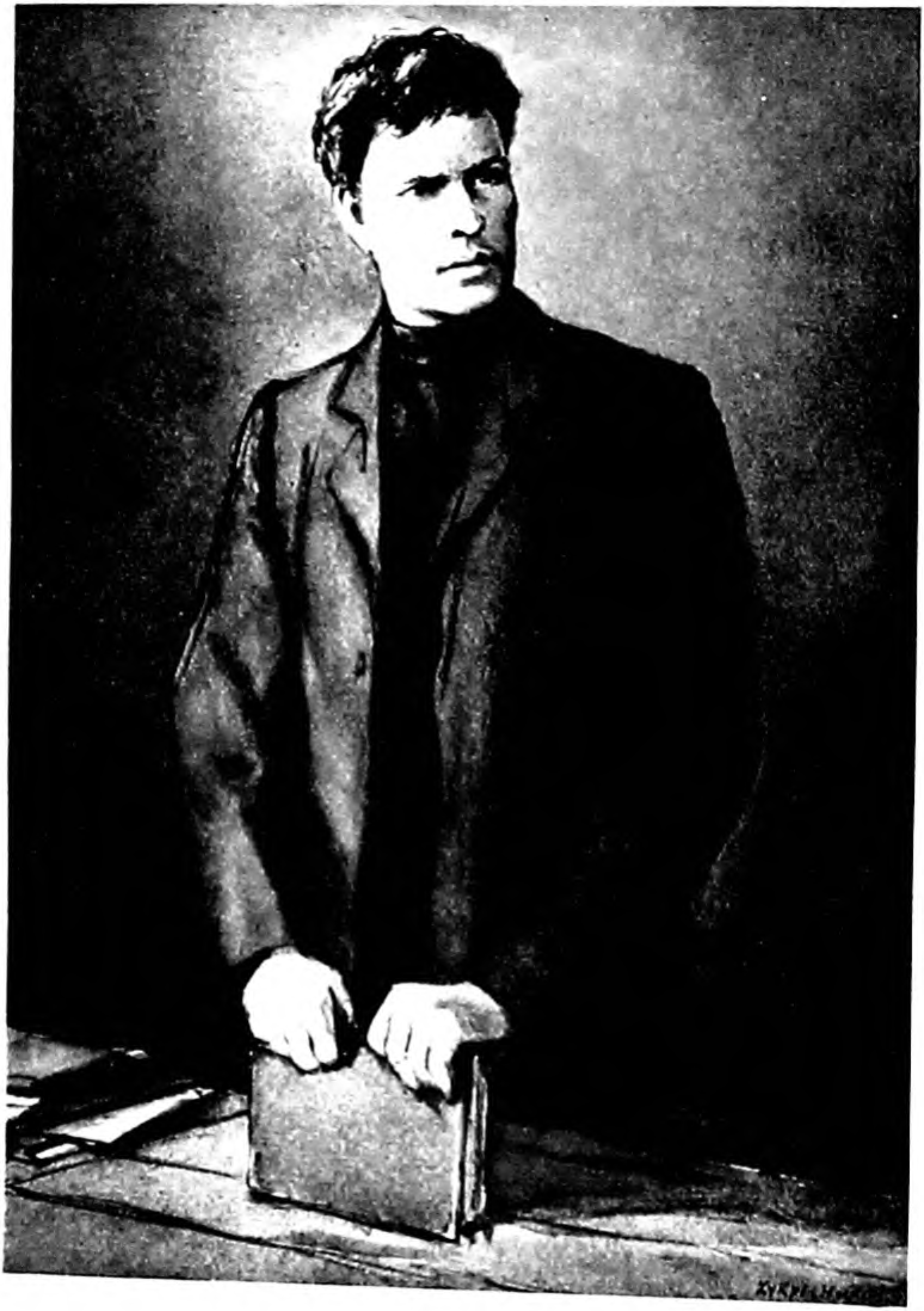
"Don't worry about me, Mummy. I'll be coming home late tonight."

She liked that. She sensed something strong and serious in his words.

But her alarms increased. Their cause became no more tangible, yet her heart grew more and more heavy with a sense of something out of the ordinary. Sometimes she was even displeased with her son, and then she would think, "Why can't he behave like other people? He's like a monk. So very serious. It doesn't become his years."

Then again she would think, "Maybe he has a girl."

But it took money to have a girl, and he gave her almost his entire wage.



And so the weeks and months passed until two years had gone by—two years of this strange, silent life full of vague thoughts and growing apprehension.

IV

One evening after supper Pavel drew the curtain over the window, and after hanging the tin lamp on the nail over his chair, sat down in the corner and began to read. His mother came out of the kitchen when the dishes were washed and slowly went over to him. He raised his head and looked at her inquiringly.

"It's nothing, Pasha," she murmured, and hastened back to the kitchen, her brows twitching nervously. But after a brief struggle with her thoughts, she washed her hands and went to him again.

"I wanted to ask you what you are reading all the time," she said quietly.

He closed the book.

"Sit down, Mummy."

His mother sat down heavily and straightened up, prepared to hear something very important.

Pavel spoke without looking at her, in a low voice which for some reason was very stern.

"I am reading forbidden books. They are forbidden because they tell the truth about us workingmen. They are printed on the sly, in secret, and if they find me with them they'll put me in jail—in jail because I want to know the truth, do you understand?"

Suddenly she found it hard to breathe. Opening her eyes, she looked at her son and scarcely knew him. His voice was different—deeper and richer and more vibrant. He plucked at his fine soft moustache and gazed strangely off into the corner from under lowered brows. She was afraid for him, and pitied him.

"Why do you do that, Pasha?" she asked.

He raised his head and looked at her.

"Because I want to know the truth," he answered calmly and quietly.

His voice was soft but firm, and there was a stubborn glint in his eyes. She realized he had pledged himself for all time to something secret and frightening. Accustomed as she was to accepting things as inevitable and to submitting without question, she simply cried quietly, too crushed by grief and anguish to find anything to say.

"Don't cry," said Pavel softly and tenderly, and she felt as if he were saying farewell.

"Just think of the life we live! Here you are forty years old, and what have you ever known? Father beat you—now I know that he took his troubles out on you, all the bitterness of his life. Something kept pressing down on him, but he didn't know what. For thirty years he slaved here—began when there were only two shops in the whole factory, and now there are seven."

She listened to him eagerly, but fearfully. Her son's eyes were burning with a lovely light. Resting his chest on the table, he leaned close to her tear-stained face and made his first speech on the truth he had just come to know. With all the strength of his youth, with all the enthusiasm of a student proud of his knowledge and believing in it utterly, he spoke of the things that were clear to him. He spoke less to convince his mother than to test himself. When he stopped, at a loss for words, he grew conscious of the pained face before him, and of the kindly eyes shining through a film of tears, gazing at him in awe and wonder. He was sorry for his mother, and when he began to speak again, it was about her and her life.

"What joy have you ever known?" he asked. "What good things have you to remember?"

She listened and shook her head sadly, filled with a strange new feeling, both joyful and grievous, that was like a caress to her aching heart. Never before had anyone spoken to her about her life, and the words roused vague thoughts that had long been forgotten; they revived a dying sense of dissatisfaction with life—the thoughts and feelings of distant youth. In her youth she had talked about life to the girls of her acquaintance. She had talked at length about everything, but all her friends, and she herself, had only complained, without seeking an explanation for the hardness of their life. But now her son was sitting before her, and all that his eyes and face and words expressed touched her very heart, filling it with pride in this son, who understood his mother's life so well, who spoke to her of her sufferings and pitied her.

Mothers are hardly ever pitied.

She knew that. All that he said about the life of women was the bitter, familiar truth, and it evoked those mixed feelings whose unwonted gentleness melted her heart.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, interrupting him.

"First study, and then teach others. We workingmen must study. We must find out and understand why our lives are so hard."

She was happy to see that his blue eyes, always so stern and serious, were now filled with a soft and tender light. A quiet smile touched her lips, although tears still trembled in the wrinkles of her cheeks. She was torn between a feeling of pride in her son, who saw the bitterness of life so well, and her realization that he was still young and that he spoke unlike anyone else, and that all alone he had undertaken to struggle against a life that everyone else, including herself, took for granted. And she wished to say to him, "But what can you do all alone, my darling?"

But she was afraid she would then lose some of the admiration she felt for him, this son who had suddenly shown himself to be so clever, and whom she could not quite understand.

Pavel saw the smile on his mother's lips, the concentration in her face, the love in her eyes, and he felt he had succeeded in making her understand the truth he championed. Youthful pride in the force of his words strengthened his belief in himself. He spoke excitedly, now smiling, now frowning, and sometimes his words were vibrant with hate, and his mother was frightened when she heard them, so hard and ringing were they, and she would shake her head and ask her son softly, "Is it possible, Pasha?"

And he would answer firmly, "Yes it is," and tell her about people who, anxious to do good, sowed the truth among the masses, for which the enemies of life hunted them down like beasts, threw them in jail and condemned them to penal servitude.

"I know such people!" he cried hotly. "They are the salt of the earth!"

The thought of these people terrified her, and once more she wanted to ask her son if it could be so, but she did not dare. With bated breath she listened to his tales of men whom she did not understand, but who had taught her son to say and think such dangerous things. At last she said to him:

"It's almost morning. You better go to bed and get some sleep."

"I'll go soon," he said; then, bending down to her, "But have you understood me?"

"Yes," she answered with a sigh. Once more the tears flowed, and suddenly she cried, "It will be your ruin!"

He rose and crossed the room.

"Well, now you know what I am doing and where I go," he said. "I have told you everything. And if you love me, I beg you not to stand in my way, Mummy."

"Oh my blessed boy!" she cried. "Maybe—maybe it would be better if you hadn't told me."

He took her hand and pressed it tightly.

She was overwhelmed by the warmth with which he had uttered the word "Mummy," and by that strange and unaccustomed pressing of her hand.

"I won't," she said brokenly. "Only watch out—do watch out!" With only the vaguest sense of what menaced him, she added mournfully, "You keep getting thinner and thinner."

She swept his strong, tall body with a loving glance.

"Live as you see fit—far be it from me to stand in your way. Only one thing I ask—be careful who you talk to. You must have the fear of people in you. They hate each other. They live in greed and envy and like to hurt each other. Once you begin to point your finger at them and accuse them, they'll hate you and destroy you."

Her son stood in the doorway listening to her anguished words, and when she had finished he smiled and said:

"You're right—people are bad. But when I learned that there is such a thing as the truth, people seemed better." Again he smiled and went on, "I don't know how it came about but when I was little I was afraid of everyone, then as I grew up I began to hate everyone, some for their beastliness, others—I don't know why—just because. But now everything seems different. Maybe that's because I feel sorry for people. Somehow my heart softened when I realized they were not always to blame for being beasts. . . ." He stopped speaking, as though listening to a voice within him, then added quietly and thoughtfully, "That's what the truth does to you!"

"Ah, dear Christ, a dangerous change has come over you," breathed his mother with a glance at him.

When he had fallen asleep, she softly got out of bed and went to him. Pavel lay on his back, the stern and stubborn contours of his brown face standing out sharply against the white pillow. His mother stood there barefoot in her night-dress, her hands pressed to her breast, her lips moving soundlessly, large tears rolling slowly down her cheeks.

V

Once more they continued their silent life, distant, yet closely attached.

On a holiday in the middle of the week, Pavel turned to his mother as he was leaving the house.

"On Saturday some people from town are coming to see me," he said.

"From town?" repeated his mother, and suddenly began to whimper.

"What's the matter, mother?" exclaimed Pavel testily.

She wiped her eyes on her apron.

"I don't know," she said with a sigh. "Nothing special. . . ."

"Afraid?"

"Yes," she admitted.

He bent toward her and spoke gruffly, in the manner of his father.

"It's fear that's the ruin of us," he said. "And those who boss us take advantage of our fear and keep bullying us."

"Don't be angry," his mother wailed unhappily. "How can I help being afraid? All my life I've been afraid. My soul is all grown over with fear!"

"I'm sorry, but it's the only way," he said in softer tones.

And he went away.

For three days she lived in fear and trembling, starting up every time she remembered that those strange and terrible people were to come to her house. It was they who had pointed out to her son the path he was taking. . . .

Saturday evening Pavel came home from the factory, washed, changed his clothes, and went out again.

"If anyone comes, say I'll be right back," he said without looking at his mother. "And do stop being afraid."

She sank weakly down on a bench. Pavel glanced at her sullenly

"Perhaps you'll—er —go out tonight?" he suggested. His words hurt her.

"No. Why should I?"

It was the end of November. Fine dry snow had fallen on the frozen earth during the day and she could hear it crunch under the feet of her son as he walked away. A hostile darkness clung to the windowpanes, lying in wait. She remained sitting there clasping the bench with both hands, her eyes fixed on the door. . . .

She imagined that bad people, strangely dressed, were slinking through the darkness. Now someone was stealing round the house, and fingers were feeling the walls.

She heard someone whistling a tune. The sound writhed thinly through the darkness and silence, sad and melodious, as if searching for something, drawing ever nearer. Suddenly it broke off at the very window, as if it had become imbedded in the wood of the wall.

There was a scuffling of footsteps on the porch. The mother started up, her brows raised tensely.

The door opened. First a head in a large, shaggy cap appeared, then a long body stooped through the low door and straightened up; a right arm was raised in greeting, there was a noisy sigh, and a deep bass voice said, "Good evening."

The mother bowed without answering.

"Pavel home?"

The stranger slowly took off his fur jacket, raised one leg as he brushed the snow off his boot with his cap, did the same thing with his other leg, tossed his cap into the corner and ambled across the room. He examined one of the chairs as though to assure himself it would hold him, then sat down and yawned, covering his mouth with his hand. He had a well-shaped, close-cropped head. His face was clean-shaven, except for a moustache with drooping ends. He carefully studied the room with large, prominent grey eyes.

"This your own hut or do you rent it?" he asked, crossing his legs and rocking back and forth on the chair.

"We rent it," answered the mother, who was sitting facing him.

"Not much of a place," he commented.

"Pasha will be back soon, just wait a bit."

"That's what I'm doing," the big man replied calmly.

She was reassured by his calmness and his soft voice and his plain face. His look was frank and friendly, and sparks of mirth danced in the depths of his clear eyes. There was something winning about his whole figure, so angular and drooping and long-legged. He was wearing a blue blouse and wide black trousers thrust into the tops of his boots. She wanted to ask who he was and where he came from and whether he had known her son long, but all of a sudden he swung forward and was himself the first to speak.

"Whoever gave you such a blow on the head, *nenko**?" he asked.

His voice was gentle and his eyes were smiling, but she was offended by his question.

"What business is it of yours, young man?" she asked with cool politeness through tight lips.

"Don't be angry," he said, leaning towards her with his entire body. "I only asked you because my foster mother had the same kind of a scar as yours. She got it from the man she lived with. A shoemaker. He struck her with a last. She was a laundress and him a shoemaker. She picked him up somewhere, to her grief, old soak that he was. That was after she adopted me. How he did beat her! My eyes used to pop out in fright!"

The mother was disconcerted by his confidence, and began to fear that Pavel would be angry with her for having answered him so sharply.

"I wasn't really angry," she said with a guilty smile. "But you asked me so sudden. It was my man did it to me too, may his soul rest in peace. Are you a Tatar**?"

The man jerked his legs and gave such a broad grin that his ears moved. Then he said with a straight face, "No, not yet."

"Your speech doesn't sound Russian," explained the mother, smiling at his little joke.

"It's better than Russian," said the guest cheerily. "I'm a *khokhol**** from Kanev."

"Been here long?"

---

* *Nenko*—affectionate term for "mother" used in the Ukraine. —*Trans.*

** Old-clothes men were commonly called Tatars.—*Trans.*

*** *Khokhol*—Russian nickname for a Ukrainian.—*Trans.*

"Lived in the town about a year, but moved out to the factory a month or so ago. Some fine people here—your son and a few others. So it's here I'll be staying, I guess," he said, pulling at his moustache.

She liked him, and wanted to repay him for the kind words he had said about her son.

"Have a glass of tea?" she asked.

"All alone?" he replied with a shrug of his shoulders. "Wait till the others come, then you can treat all of us."

His words reminded her of her fears.

"If only the rest would be like him!" she thought.

Once more she heard footsteps on the porch. The door was flung open and again the mother stood up. But to her surprise a young girl entered the kitchen. She was rather small, had the plain face of a peasant, and wore her fair hair in a single thick braid.

"Am I late?" asked the girl softly.

"No," answered the *khokhol*, glancing through the doorway. "Walk over?"

"Of course. Are you the mother of Pavel Mikhailovich? Good evening. My name is Natasha."

"And your patronymic?" asked the mother.

"Vasilyevna. And yours?"

"Nilovna. Pelagea Nilovna."

"So now we know each other."

"Yes," said the mother with a slight catch of her breath as she smiled at the girl.

"Cold?" asked the *khokhol* as he helped the girl take off her coat.

"Awfully. Such a wind out in the fields!"

Her voice was rich and clear, her mouth small, her lips full, and altogether she was as round and fresh as a peach. After taking off her things, she rubbed her rosy cheeks with

KASHMIR UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
19.8

little hands inflamed with cold and quickly entered the other room, her heels tapping sharply on the floor.

"She doesn't wear galoshes," was the mother's mental note.

"Br-r-r!" said the girl with a shiver. "I'm frozen stiff."

"Here, I'll heat the samovar," said the mother, hurrying into the kitchen. "Just a minute."

She felt as if she had known this girl for a long time, and she loved her with the fine, sympathetic love of a mother. A smile played about her lips as she listened to the talk in the next room.

"What are you moping about, Nakhodka?" asked the girl.

"Nothing special," answered the *khokhol* quietly. "The widow has nice eyes, and I was thinking that perhaps my mother's were the same. I often think of my mother; I have an idea she's alive."

"But you said she was dead."

"That was my foster mother. I'm speaking of my own mother. She's probably begging somewhere on the streets of Kiev. And drinking vodka. And the police slapping her in the face whenever she gets drunk. . . ."

"Poor boy," thought the mother with a sigh.

Natasha said something quick and soft and impassioned. Once more the voice of the *khokhol* rang out.

"You're still an infant—haven't eaten enough onions yet," he said. "It's a hard thing to bring a man into the world, but it's even harder to teach him to be decent."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the mother to herself, longing to speak words of comfort to the *khokhol*. But the door opened slowly and in came Nikolai Vesovshchikov, son of the old thief Danilo. Nikolai was known throughout the settlement for his unsociability. He always held himself sullenly aloof, and people teased him for it.

"What is it, Nikolai?" she asked in surprise.

"Pavel home?" he asked without greeting her as he wiped his broad, pock-marked face with the palm of his hand.

"No."

He glanced into the room and then went in.

"Evening, comrades," he said.

"Him?" thought the mother disapprovingly, and was amazed to see Natasha offer him her hand as though she were glad to see him.

Nikolai was followed by two others, both of them mere boys. The mother knew one of them, a sharp-featured, curly-headed lad with a high forehead named Feodor, nephew of the old factory hand Sizov. The other was shy and had straight hair combed flat to his head. She did not know him, but he seemed to offer no terrors. At last Pavel put in his appearance, accompanied by two young factory workers whom she knew.

"You're heating the samovar?" Pavel said gently. "Thank you."

"Shall I go and buy some vodka?" she asked, wondering how to express her gratitude for something she could not define.

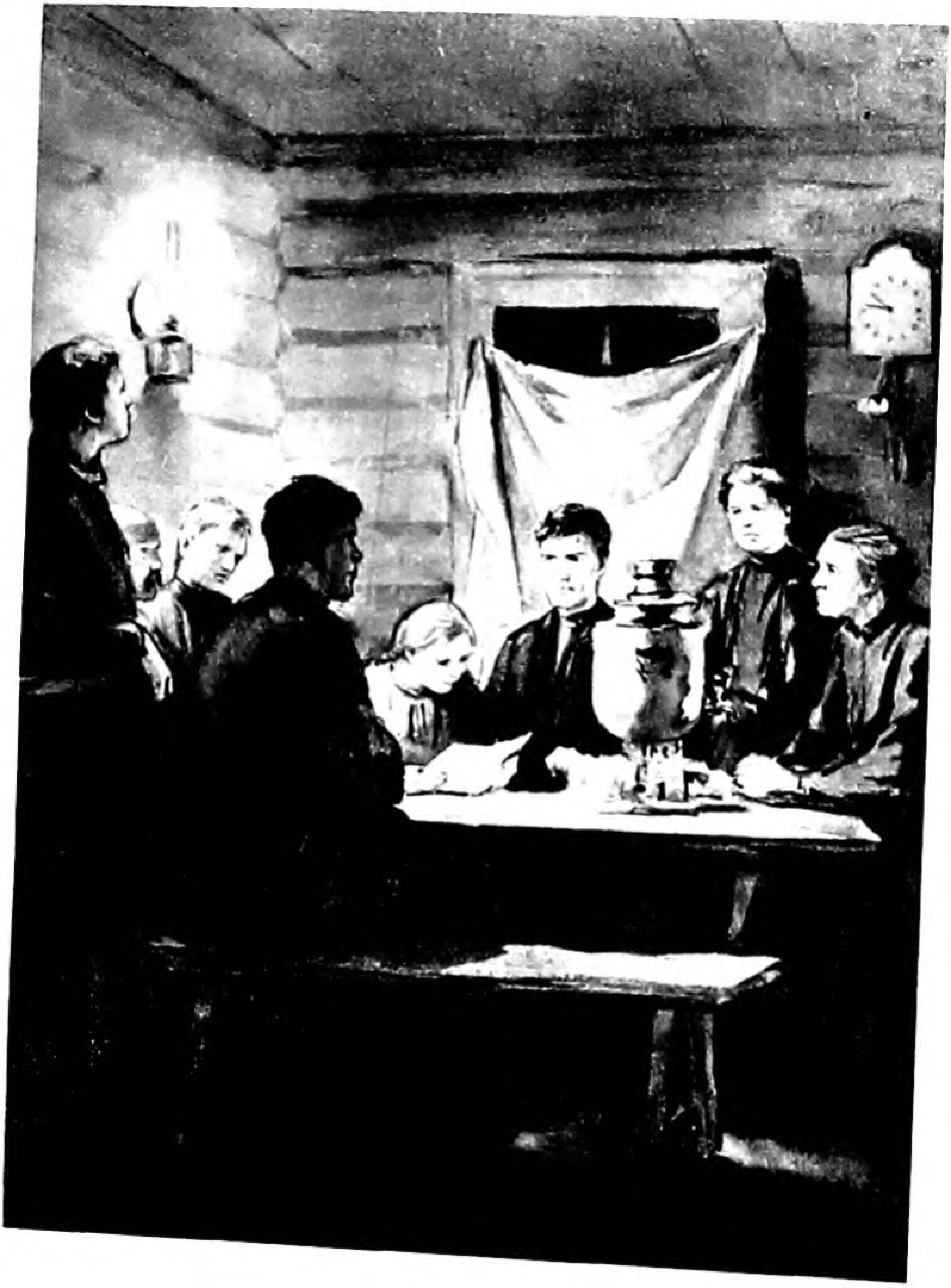
"No, we don't drink," answered Pavel with an amiable smile.

She was struck by the idea that her son had exaggerated the danger of this gathering in order to have a good laugh at her expense.

"Are those the—the forbidden people?" she asked under her breath.

"They are," answered Pavel, slipping into the next room.

"You don't say!" she called after him affectionately, thinking with condescension, "He's still such a child."



VI

When the samovar was ready, the mother carried it into the room. The guests were sitting about the table, with Natasha in the corner under the lamp holding a book.

"In order to understand why people have such a hard life . . ." said Natasha.

"And why they themselves are so hard . . ." put in the *khokhol.*

". . . we must look into their social origin. . . ."

"Go ahead and look, my dears, go right ahead," said the mother as she brewed the tea.

Everyone stopped talking.

"What's the idea, mother?" asked Pavel with a frown.

"The idea?" She glanced up and saw that everyone was looking at her. "Oh, I was just talking to myself," she murmured in embarrassment. "Wondering why you shouldn't look, if you wanted to."

Natasha laughed and Pavel chuckled.

"Thanks for the tea, *nenko,*" said the *khokhol.*

"Better hold your thanks till you've tried it," she said; then with a glance at her son, "But maybe I'm in the way?"

"How could a hostess be in the way of her guests?" replied Natasha. "But do hurry and give me some tea! I'm shivering all over and my feet are like ice." Her tone was as plaintive as a child's.

"Right away, right away," said the mother quickly.

When Natasha had drunk her tea she gave a loud sigh, tossed her braid over her shoulder and began to read from the illustrated book with a yellow cover. The mother tried to make no noise as she poured out the tea and listened. The girl's ringing voice merged with the meditative hum of the samovar, while a ribbon of tales was unwound, all about wild men who once inhabited caves and hunted with stones. They sounded like fairy tales, and the mother kept glancing at her son, wanting to ask him why such stories should be forbidden. But soon she tired of following the reading and began to study the guests furtively, so that they and her son should not be aware of it.

Pavel was sitting next to Natasha, and he was the handsomest of them all. As Natasha leaned over her book, she kept pushing back the hair that fell over her temples. With a toss of her head and a lowering of her voice she would make remarks of her own, without looking into the book, glancing affectionately at the faces about her. The *khokhol* sprawled at one end of the table and squinted down his nose to get a look at the ends of the moustache he was plucking. Vesovshchikov sat as straight as a stick on his chair, his palms pushing against his knees, his pock-marked, browless, thin-lipped face as expressionless as a mask. He kept his narrow eyes fixed unwinking on the reflection of his face in the shiny brass samovar and scarcely seemed to breathe. Little Feodor moved his lips noiselessly as he listened to the reading, as if repeating the words of the book to himself, while his friend sat all bent over, his elbows on his knees, his cheeks in his palms, a thoughtful smile on his lips. One of the chaps who had come with Pavel had curly red hair and merry green eyes. He kept twisting about restlessly, as though he wanted to say something. The other chap, blond and close-cropped, kept running his hand over his head and staring at the floor; the mother could hardly see his face. The room was strangely cosy. It had an unfamiliar air, and as Natasha read on, she recalled the noisy parties of her own youth, the coarse language and cynical jokes of the boys, whose breath always reeked of vodka. And as she recalled them, her heart contracted with self-pity.

She remembered how she had become engaged to her husband. At one of those parties he had caught her in a dark passage and pressed her against the wall.

"Going to marry me?" he had asked her gruffly. She had been hurt and offended, but he kept on painfully clutching at her breasts and pouring his hot, moist breath into her face. She pulled away, trying to free herself from his grasp.

"Hold on!" he snarled. "Give me an answer, d'you hear?"

Breathless with shame and insult, she could not reply.

Then someone had opened the door and he had slowly loosened his grip.

"On Sunday I'll send the matchmaker round," he said.

And he did.

The mother closed her eyes and gave a deep sigh. . . .

"I want to know how people *ought* to live, not how they used to live," came the protesting voice of Vesovshchikov.

"That's right," said the redhead, getting up.

"Oh no!" cried Feodor.

Words leaped up like flames as they argued. The mother did not understand what they were shouting about. All the faces were flushed with excitement, but no one lost his temper and no one used the coarse language so familiar to her.

"They're ashamed to in front of the girl," she decided.

She liked the serious expression on Natasha's face as she watched everyone attentively, as if these young men were mere children.

"Just a minute, comrades," she cried suddenly, and they all stopped talking and looked at her.

"Those of you are right who say we must know everything. We must kindle in ourselves the light of reason, so as to be seen by those who are struggling in darkness. We must have a true and honest answer for everything. We must know the whole truth and the whole falsehood. . . ."

3*

The *khokhol* listened and nodded his head in rhythm to her words. Vesovshchikov and the redhead and one of the boys from the factory who had come with Pavel stood in a group off to one side, and for some reason the mother did not like them.

When Natasha had finished speaking, Pavel stood up.

"Is it only a full stomach we want? Nothing of the sort," he said calmly, looking at the three. "We must show those who are straddling our backs and holding blinders over our eyes that we see everything. We are not stupid, and we are not beasts to want nothing but a full stomach. We want to live a life worthy of human beings. We must prove to our enemies that the life of drudgery they have saddled us with doesn't keep us from being their intellectual equals and even superiors!"

A feeling of pride rose in his mother's breast as she listened to him. How well he spoke!

"There are plenty of people who get enough to eat, but few who are honest!" said the *khokhol*. "We must build a bridge across the bog of this beastly life to the future kingdom of human brotherhood. That's the task facing us, comrades!"

"If it's time to fight, why sit with folded hands?" objected Vesovshchikov gruffly.

It was after midnight when the gathering broke up. Vesovshchikov and the redhead were the first to leave, and this, too, displeased the mother.

"What a hurry they're in!" she thought as she bowed to them stiffly.

"Will you see me home, Nakhodka?" asked Natasha.

"Indeed I will," answered the *khokhol*.

"Your stockings are a bit thin for this kind of weather," said the mother to Natasha as the girl was putting on her things in the kitchen. "Would you let me knit you a pair of woollen ones?"

"Thank you, Pelagea Nilovna, but woollen ones itch," answered Natasha with a laugh.

"I'll knit you the kind that don't itch," said the mother.

Natasha looked at her through narrowed lids, and her steady gaze made the older woman uneasy.

"You must excuse my foolishness. It was from my heart I said it," she added quietly.

"What a darling you are!" replied Natasha just as quietly, pressing her hand impulsively.

"Good night, *nenko,*" said the *khokhol,* glancing into her eyes as he ducked through the door in the wake of Natasha.

The mother looked at her son. He stood in the doorway smiling.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked uneasily.

"Nothing special. Just feeling good."

"I may be old and stupid, but even so I can tell good from bad," she answered with some asperity.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "But hadn't you better be getting to bed?"

"In a minute."

She fussed about the table clearing away the tea things, very much pleased—so pleased, in fact, that she broke out in a perspiration. She was glad that everything had been so pleasant and had ended so peacefully.

"You were good to think it up, Pasha," she said. "The *khokhol* is very nice. And the girl—what a smart little thing she is! Who is she?"

"A teacher," answered Pavel curtly, pacing the floor.

"She must be very poor. So badly dressed. It doesn't take much to catch a cold. Where are her parents?"

"In Moscow," answered Pavel, then, stopping in front of his mother he said softly and very seriously, "Her father is rich. He's in the iron business and owns a lot of property. He disowned her because she chose this path in life. She was brought up in comfort, used to having everything she wanted. But now she walks seven versts at night all alone. . . ."

His mother was shocked by this information. She stood still in the centre of the room twitching her brows and looking at her son. Then she asked quietly, "Has she gone to town?"

"Yes."

"Dear me! Isn't she afraid?"

"You can see for yourself she isn't," laughed Pavel.

"But why did she go? She could have spent the night here, slept with me."

"That wouldn't do. She might be seen here in the morning, and we don't want that."

His mother gazed thoughtfully out of the window.

"I can't see what is so dangerous—and forbidden—in this, Pavel," she said softly. "You don't do anything wrong, do you?"

This was what worried her, and she wanted to be reassured.

"No, we don't do anything wrong," he answered firmly, looking her calmly in the eye. "And yet all of us will find ourselves in jail some day. You should know this."

Her hands trembled.

"Perhaps—God willing—you will escape it somehow?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"No," answered her son gently. "I don't want to deceive you. It can't be escaped."

He smiled.

"Go to bed now. You're tired. Good night."

When she was alone she went to the window and stood looking out. It was cold and hazy outside. The wind was blowing the snow off the roofs of the sleepy little houses, beating against the walls, whispering angrily as it swooped to the ground and chased little clouds of snowflakes down the street.

"Have mercy on us, dear Jesus," whispered the mother softly.

Tears surged in her heart, and a premonition of the misfortune her son had spoken of with such calm confidence fluttered in her breast as blindly as a moth in the night. Before her she seemed to see a snowy plain across which a tattered white wind raced and plunged, shrieking thinly. In the middle of the plain staggered the small dark figure of a girl. The wind whirled about her feet, blowing out her skirts and hurling the stinging snow into her face. She advanced with difficulty, her little feet sinking in the drifts. It was cold and eerie. Her body arched forward like a lonely blade of grass bent under the onslaught of an autumn wind. To her right the forest wall rose out of the swamp, where thin birches and naked aspens whispered forlornly. Far up ahead shimmered the lights of the town.

"Dear Saviour, have mercy," whispered the mother with a shudder. . . .

VII

The days slipped past one after another, like the beads of a rosary, building the weeks and the months. Every Saturday Pavel's friends gathered at his house, and every gathering was one more step in the long stairway up which people were slowly climbing to some distant goal.

New people joined the old ones. The little room in the Vlassovs' house grew crowded. Natasha was always tired and frozen when she came, but invariably cheerful. Pavel's mother knitted her a pair of stockings and pulled them on the girl's little feet herself. Natasha laughed, but suddenly grew quiet and thoughtful.

"Once I had a nurse who was also wonderfully kind," she said softly. "How strange it is, Pelagea Nilovna—working people have such a hard, unfair life, and yet they are kinder than those others"—indicating people far away—very far away from her.

"What a one you are!" said Pelagea. "Without your parents and all. . . ." She sighed and was silent, unable to give expression to her thoughts, but as she looked into Natasha's face she again experienced that feeling of gratitude for something she could not define. She sat on the floor in front of the girl, who smiled musingly with her head bent forward.

"Without my parents?" she repeated. "That isn't important. My father is a rough man, and so is my brother. And a drunkard besides. My older sister is unhappy—she married a man many years older than herself—very rich but greedy. I feel sorry for my mother. She's a simple woman, like you. As tiny as a mouse, and runs as fast as a mouse and is just as afraid of everybody. Sometimes I want to see her—oh, so badly!"

"You poor dear!" said the mother, shaking her head sadly.

The girl quickly threw back her head and stretched out her hand as though pushing something away.

"Oh no! Sometimes I'm so happy—so very happy!"

Her face paled and her blue eyes flashed. She put her hands on the mother's shoulders.

"If you only knew, if you could only understand what a tremendous thing we are doing!" she said softly and impressively.

Something that was almost envy touched the heart of Pelagea Vlassova.

"I'm too old for that. And illiterate . . ." she said wistfully, rising from the floor. . . .

Pavel talked more often now, and for a longer time, and with more intensity. And he kept getting thinner. It seemed to his mother that when he looked at Natasha and spoke to her, the severe expression of his eyes softened, his voice grew more gentle and his manner less brusque.

"May the Lord help it to be so," she thought, smiling.

Whenever the arguments at their gatherings became too heated and stormy, the *khokhol* would get up and stand there swaying back and forth like the hammer of a bell while he said a few kind, simple words that quickly calmed and sobered everyone. The sullen Vesovshchikov was always urging the others to do something; he and the redhead, whom they called Samoilov, began all the arguments. They were supported by the towheaded Ivan Bukin, who looked as though he had been washed in lye. Yakov Somov, smooth and clean, spoke little, but very earnestly. He and Feodor Mazin of the large brow always sided with Pavel and the *khokhol*.

Sometimes Natasha's place was taken by Nikolai Ivanovich, a man in spectacles with a little blond goatee. He had been born in some remote province, which accounted for the peculiar accentuation of the "o's" in his speech. Altogether he was "remote." He would speak of the simplest things—of family life, and children, and trade, and the police, and the price of bread and meat—all matters comprising the daily life of the people. In doing so he would expose all that was false and irrational, all that was stupid and even ridiculous, but harmful to the masses. The mother imagined that he had come from very far away, from a different realm, in fact, where everyone lived an easy, honest life. Here everything was strange to him, and he could not get used to this life, nor accept it. He disliked it, and this dislike roused in him a calm, persistent desire to change it in his own way. He had a sallow face with fine lines about the eyes. His voice was soft and his hands were always warm. Whenever he greeted Pelagea Vlassova, he took her whole hand in a firm grasp, that she found comforting.

Other people from the town appeared at these gatherings—most often a tall, slender girl with enormous eyes in a pale face; her name was Sasha. There was something mannish in her walk and movements. She kept drawing her thick, dark eyebrows together in a frown and the thin nostrils of her straight nose quivered when she spoke.

She was the first to announce in a loud, sharp voice:

"We are Socialists."

When the mother heard this, she stared at the girl in silent awe. Pelagea had heard that Socialists had killed the tsar. That had been in the days of her youth. At that time it was rumoured that the landed gentry, in their desire to avenge themselves on the tsar for having freed their serfs, took an oath not to cut their hair until they had killed him. That was why they had been called Socialists. Now Pelagea was at a loss to understand why her son and his friends called themselves Socialists.

When everyone had gone home, she went up to Pavel.

"Are you a Socialist, Pasha?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, standing before her, as strong and straight as ever. "Why?"

His mother gave a deep sigh and dropped her eyes.

"Really, Pavel? But they are—against the tsar. They even killed one tsar."

Pavel crossed the room, rubbing his cheek with his hand.

"We don't need to do things like that," he said with a short laugh.

Then he spoke to her for a long time in a grave and quiet voice. As she looked into his face she thought:

"He'll never do anything wrong. He couldn't!"

After that the dreadful word was repeated again and again until the sharp edge was worn off and her ear became as used to it as to the dozens of other strange words they used. But she did not like Sasha and felt disturbed and uncomfortable in her presence.

One day she spoke about her to the *khokhol*, compressing her lips in displeasure.

"She's such a strict body! Giving everybody orders—do this, do that!"

The *khokhol* laughed heartily.

"You hit the nail on the head, *nenko*! How do you like that, Pavel?" Winking to the mother, he added with a twinkle in his eye: "That's the nobility for you!"

"She's a fine girl," said Pavel dryly.

"She is," confirmed the *khokhol*, "but she doesn't understand one thing: for her it's 'must'; for us it's 'can' and 'want to.'"

And they began arguing about something beyond the mother's ken.

She noticed that Sasha was strictest towards Pavel; sometimes she even shouted at him. At such times Pavel would say nothing; he would only laugh and look into the girl's face with the same soft glance he had once turned on Natasha. The mother didn't like this.

Sometimes Pelagea was amazed by the joyous mood which would suddenly seize all of them. Usually this occurred on evenings when they read newspaper accounts of the workers' movement abroad. Then their eyes would shine, and they would become strangely, childishly happy, laughing their clear, bright laughter and patting each other affectionately on the shoulder.

"Hurrah for our German comrades!" shouted someone, as though drunk with his own joy.

"Long live the Italian workers!" they cried on another occasion.

As they sent off these cheers to distant workers who did not know them and could not even understand their tongue, they seemed sure that these unknown people heard them and appreciated their joy.

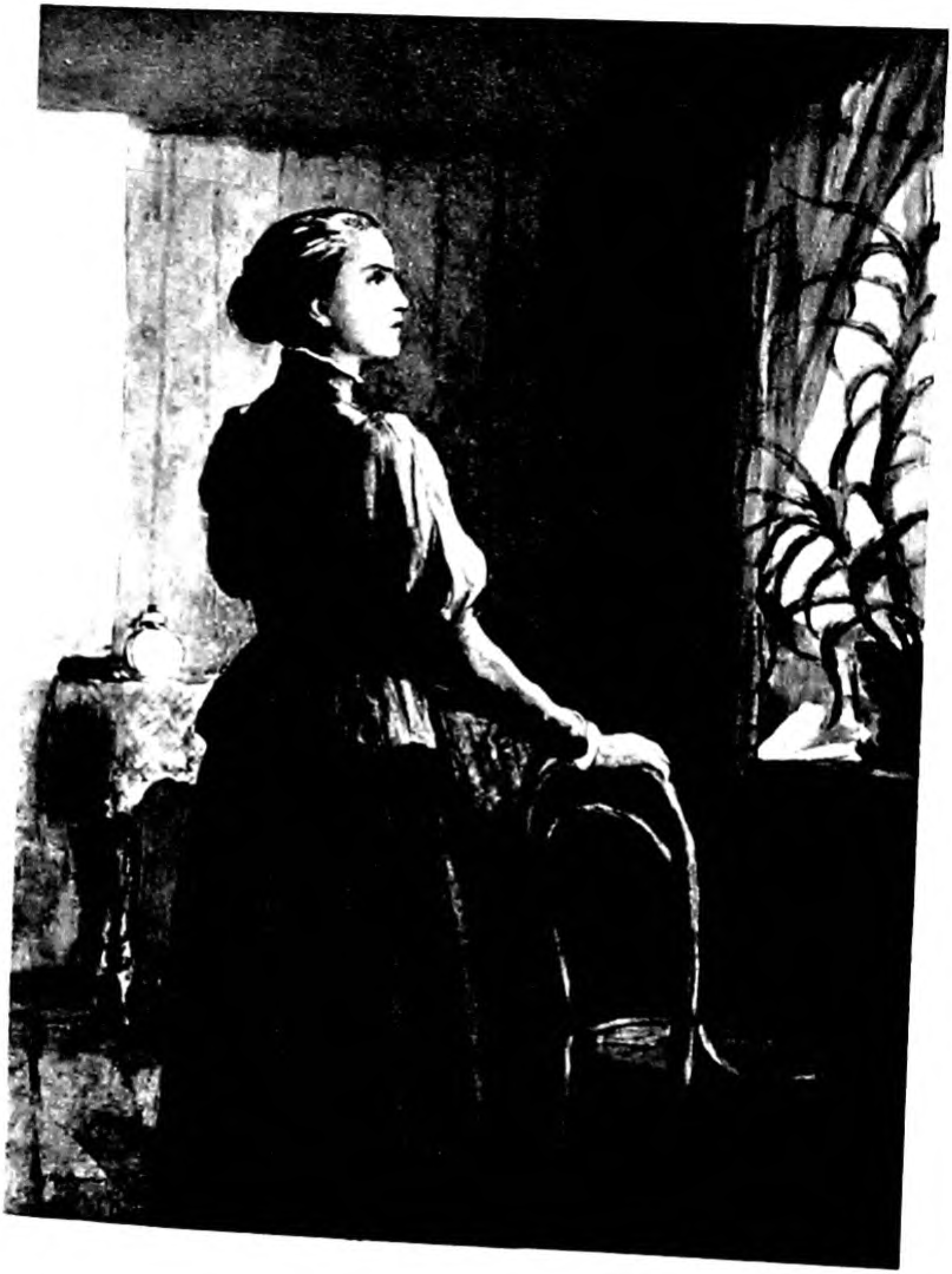
"Wouldn't it be a good idea to write to them?" said the *khokhol*, his eyes shining benignly. "To let them know they have friends living here in Russia who profess and are spreading the same faith, who live with the same purpose and rejoice in the same victories."

With beaming faces they would speak of the French and English and Swedes as of their friends, people who were close to their hearts, whom they esteemed, and whose joys and sorrows they shared.

A feeling of spiritual affinity with the workers of the whole world was born in this stuffy little room. It was felt by all, including the mother, and though she could not grasp its meaning, she was aware of its force—so youthful, so intoxicatingly joyful, so full of hope.

"Just look at you!" she once said to the *khokhol*. "All people are your comrades—Jews and Armenians and Austrians. Glad and sorry for all of them!"

"For all of them, my *nenko*! All of them!" exclaimed the *khokhol*. "We know no tribes or nations. Only comrades, only enemies. All workingmen are our comrades; all rich men, all governments, are our enemies. When you cast your eye over the earth and see how many of us workers there



are, and how strong we are, then there is no end to your joy and the holiday in your heart! The Frenchman and the German feels just the same when he looks at things, *nenko*, and so does the Italian. We are all children of one mother, all fired with invincible faith in the brotherhood of the workingmen of the whole world. This thought warms our hearts. It is the sun shining in a just heaven, and that heaven is the heart of the worker. Whoever he is, whatever he calls himself, a Socialist is our brother in spirit for all time—yesterday and today and forever!"

This childlike but firm faith manifested itself more and more frequently among them, in a more and more exalted form, growing into a mighty force. And when the mother beheld it, she instinctively felt that the world has indeed begotten something great and good like the sun, which she could see with her own eyes.

Often they sang. In loud, happy voices they sang the simple songs that everybody knew, but sometimes they sang new songs, serious ones, with lovely harmonies and unusual melodies. These they sang in hushed voices, as if they were singing church music. The faces of the singers flushed and paled, and great strength was expressed in the resounding words.

The mother was especially stirred by one of the new songs. It did not voice the painful ponderings of an injured soul wandering lonely through a labyrinth of doubt and uncertainty. Nor did it reflect the plaints of creatures crushed by need, subdued by fear, devoid of colour and personality. Nor yet could be heard in it the mournful sighs of a blind force groping in space, nor the challenging cries of reckless daring, ready to fling itself equally at the good and the evil. The song did not sing an undiscriminating sense of hurt and desire for revenge, capable of destroying but incapable of building. There was nothing of the old slavish world in this song.

The mother did not like its harsh words and stern tune, but behind the words and the tune was something greater, which drowned out the words and the tune, evoking a sense of something too immense to be embraced by thought. She saw this something in the eyes and faces of the young people, she sensed that it lived within them, and, submitting to a force that overran the boundaries of words and music, she listened with greater attention and deeper agitation to this song than to any other.

They sang it softer than the others, but it sounded stronger, and enveloped the people like the air of a March day, the first day of approaching spring.

"Time for us to sing that song out on the streets," Vesovshchikov would say sullenly.

When his father was put in jail again for his latest theft, Vesovshchikov said to his comrades, "We can meet at my place now."

Almost every evening one of Pavel's friends came home with him after work and they would sit reading and jotting down notes, too hurried and absorbed even to have a wash. They had supper and tea with books in their hands, and it became harder and harder for the mother to understand what they talked about.

"We ought to start a newspaper," Pavel often said.

Life became more rushed and feverish and people moved more swiftly from one book to another, like bees flitting from flower to flower.

"They're beginning to talk about us," said Vesovshchikov. "They'll start rounding us up soon."

"A herring was born to land in a net," observed the *khokhol*.

The mother grew fonder of him every day. When he called her "*nenko*" it was as if an infant's soft hand had caressed her cheek. If Pavel was busy on a Sunday, the *khokhol* would chop the wood. One day he arrived with a board over his shoulder, and, taking up the hatchet, he quickly and skilfully built a new porch step to replace the one that had rotted away. Another time he just as inconspicuously mended the sagging fence. He always whistled some beautiful sad tune as he worked.

"Let's take the *khokhol* in as a lodger," she said to her son one day. "It'll be better for both of you—you won't have to be running to each other's houses."

"Why should you make things harder for yourself?" answered Pavel with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Nonsense," she said. "All my life's been hard for no good reason. Let it be hard for the sake of a good man like him."

"Just as you say," said her son. "I'll be glad if he comes."

So the *khokhol* came to lodge with them.

VIII

The little house on the outskirts of the settlement attracted attention; dozens of ferret eyes tried to bore through its walls. The spotted wings of rumour fluttered excitedly above it. People tried to scare out the something mysterious they felt to be lurking within the house on the edge of the embankment. At night they peeped through the windows and sometimes even tapped on the pane, only to dart away in fright.

One day Pelagea was stopped on the street by the tavern-keeper Beguntsov, a fine-looking old man who always wore a vest of thick purple plush and a black silk kerchief tied about his flabby red neck. His sharp shiny nose was straddled by a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, and this had won him the nickname of "Bone-Eyes."

Without stopping for breath or waiting for an answer, he showered the mother with words as hard as hail.

"How are you, Pelagea Nilovna? And your son? Not thinking of getting married, is he? In full flower for it, seems to me. The sooner the sons are married, the easier for the parents. A man keeps better, body and soul, in a family—like a mushroom in vinegar. I'd be marrying him off if I was you. The times demand a careful eye on how a man deports himself. People are beginning to live as they please. Too much loose thinking and acting. They don't go to the house of the Lord any more and keep away from public places, sneaking off into dark corners to whisper their secrets. Why whisper, I'd like to know? Why shun people? What is it a person's scared to say in public—in the tavern, for example? Secrets? The only place for secrets is in our holy apostolic church! The secrets whispered in corners come from a mix-up of the mind. Wishing you the best of health, Pelagea Nilovna!"

Taking off his cap, he flourished it and was gone, leaving the mother puzzled.

Another time the Vlassovs' neighbour Maria Korsunova, a blacksmith's widow who made a living by peddling food at the factory gates, met Pelagea at the market and said, "Keep an eye on that son of yours, Pelagea!"

"What do you mean?" asked the mother.

"Rumours is going round," said Maria secretively. "Bad ones, mother o' mine. They say he's forming a secret sect, like the Flagellants. Going to flog each other, like the Flagellants. . . ."

"Stuff and nonsense, Maria!"

"No smoke without a flame," observed the peddler.

The mother reported these conversations to her son, but he only shrugged his shoulders, while the *khokhol* laughed in his deep, soft way.

"The girls are hurt, too," she said. "You're fine lads, good enough for any girl, hard-working and no drunkards, but you don't pay them a bit of attention. They say that bad girls come to see you from the town. . . ."

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed Pavel with a grimace of disgust.

"In a bog, everything stinks," said the *khokhol* with a sigh. "You'd do better to explain to the little fools what married life means, *nenko*. Then they wouldn't be in such a hurry to break their necks."

"Dear me!" said the mother. "They see everything well enough, and they understand, but what else can they do?"

"If they understood, they'd find something else to do," observed Pavel.

His mother glanced at his set face.

"Why not teach them? Ask the smarter ones to come here."

"It wouldn't do," said her son dryly.

"What if we try?" asked the *khokhol*.

Pavel was silent before he answered.

"They'd just begin going off in pairs, some of them would get married, and that'd be the end of it."

His mother grew thoughtful. She was worried by Pavel's ascetic severity. She could see that everyone, even his older comrades liked the *khokhol*, took his advice, but it seemed to her that they feared him, and that no one loved him because of his severity.

One evening when she was already in bed and her son and the *khokhol* were still reading, the sound of their hushed voices came to her through the thin partition.

"I like that Natasha," exclaimed the *khokhol* suddenly.

"I know it," answered Pavel after a pause.

She heard the *khokhol* get up slowly and pace the floor in his bare feet. He began to whistle softly and forlornly, then broke off to speak once more in his low voice:

"I wonder if she has noticed."

Pavel made no reply.

"What do you think?" asked the *khokhol,* almost in a whisper.

"She has," answered Pavel. "That's why she stopped coming here."

The *khokhol* drew his feet heavily across the floor and again his soft whistling throbbed in the room.

"What if I tell her?" he asked.

"Tell her what?"

"Tell her—that I—" began the *khokhol* softly.

"Why should you?" interrupted Pavel.

The mother heard the *khokhol* stop pacing, and she sensed that he was smiling.

"I think if you love a girl you ought to tell her, or nothing will come of it."

Pavel snapped his book shut.

"What do you want to come of it?" he asked.

Both of them were silent for a long time.

"Well?" asked the *khokhol*.

"You must have a clear idea of what you want, Andrei," said Pavel slowly. "Suppose she loves you—I doubt it, but just suppose—and you get married. A fine match! She an intellectual, and you a workingman. Children will come and you'll have to slave day and night to support them. Life will become a grind for the sake of a loaf of bread, for the sake of the children and the rent. You'll be lost to the cause. Both of you."

There was a pause. Then Pavel spoke again, and his tone seemed less downright.

"Better give up all that, Andrei. Don't make it hard for her."

Silence. The pendulum of the clock sounded distinctly, ticking out the seconds.

"Half of my heart loves, half of it hates. Do you call that a heart?" said the *khokhol*.

The pages of a book rustled—Pavel must have gone on with his reading. His mother lay with her eyes closed, afraid even to breathe. She pitied the *khokhol* with all her heart, but she pitied her son even more.

"My poor boy!" she thought.

"So you think I shouldn't tell her anything?" burst out the *khokhol* suddenly.

"No, you shouldn't," said Pavel quietly.

"So I won't," said the *khokhol*. In a few seconds he added softly and sadly, "It'll be hard for you, Pavel, when you get to be like this."

"It's already hard."

The wind scraped at the walls of the house. The pendulum kept on marking the passage of time.

"It's no joke, this," said the *khokhol* slowly.

The mother buried her face in the pillow and wept noiselessly.

In the morning she imagined that Andrei had grown smaller and become even more likeable. Her son was as straight and thin and silent as ever. She had never before called the *khokhol* anything but Andrei Onisimovich, but today, without noticing it, she said:

"Andryusha, you better have your boots mended or you'll be catching cold."

"I'll buy myself a new pair next pay day," he replied with a laugh. Then he flung a long arm across her shoulders and said, "Maybe you're my real mother after all! Only you don't want to admit it because I'm so ugly, is that it?"

She patted him on the hand without answering. She wanted to say many loving words, but her heart was constricted with pity and the words would not leave her lips.

IX

People in the settlements began to talk about the Socialists who were distributing leaflets written in blue ink. These leaflets harshly criticized the management of the factory, told about strikes in Petersburg and in the south of Russia, and called on the workers to unite in defence of their own interests.

Middle-aged people who were making good money at the factory were furious.

"Troublemakers!" they said. "Ought to have their mugs smashed for such things!" And they took the leaflets to their bosses.

The young people read them with enthusiasm.

"It's all true!" they said.

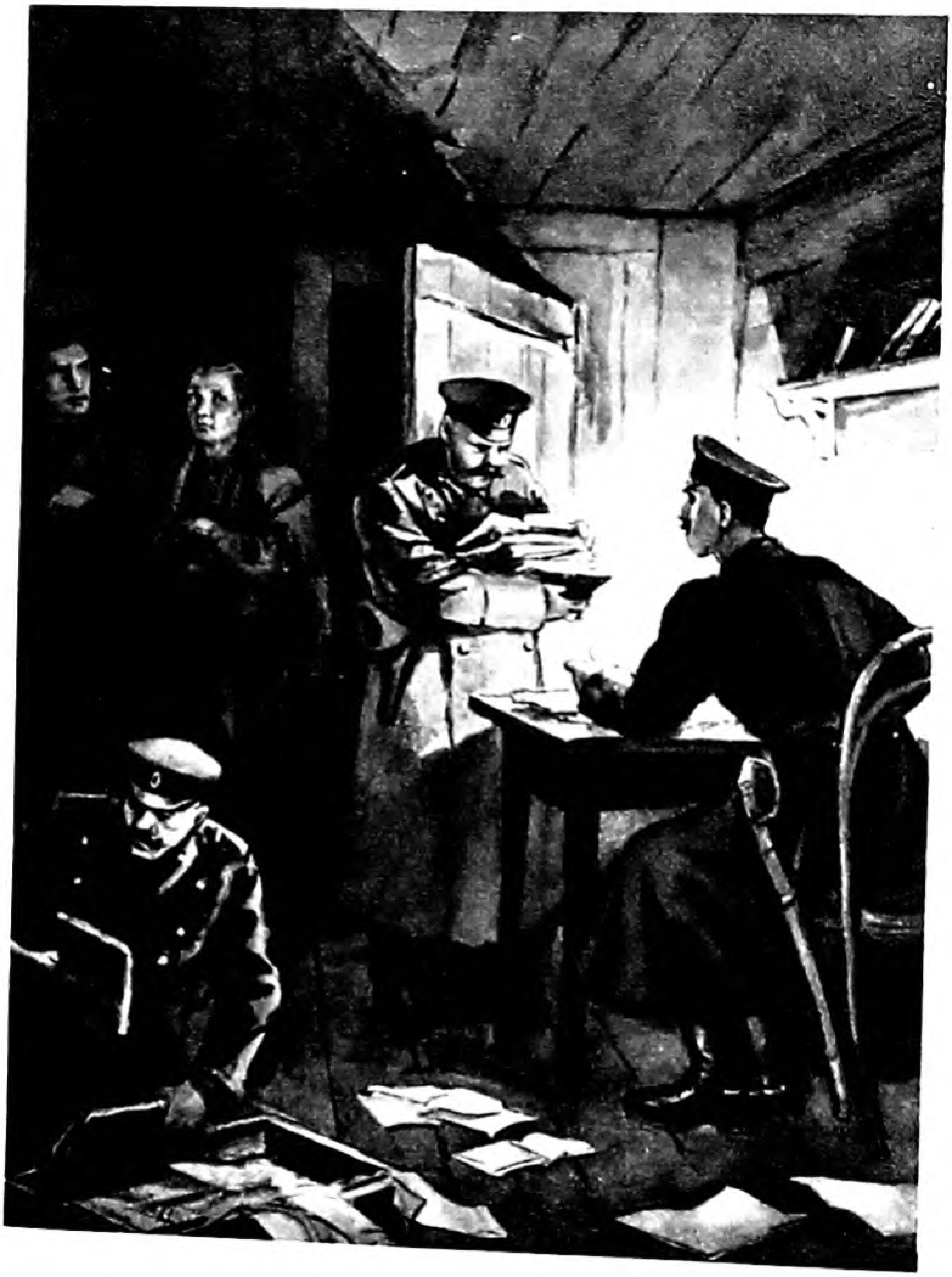
The majority of the workers, worn out by the daily grind, responded apathetically.

"Nothing will come of it. It's impossible."

But the leaflets caused a stir, and once when no new issue appeared for a week, the workers said to each other, "Looks as if they've stopped printing them."

The following Monday, however, new ones came out, and the workers began to whisper among themselves again.

At the factory and in the tavern appeared people nobody knew. They kept looking about, sniffing and asking questions, immediately rousing suspicion either by their excessive cau-



tion or by the manner in which they pried into everyone's business.

The mother realized that all this excitement was a result of her son's activities. She saw that people were drawn to him, and her pride was mingled with anxiety for his welfare.

One evening Maria Korsunova knocked at the Vlassovs' window, and when the mother opened it, said in a loud whisper:

"Take care, Pelagea! The game's up! They're going to search your house tonight, and the Mazins' and the Vesovshchikovs' too."

Maria's thick lips slapped together quickly, she sniffled through her fleshy nose, blinked and glanced first to one side, then to the other, keeping her eye on someone out in the street.

"And I don't know a thing and didn't tell you nothing and didn't even see you today, hear?"

She went away.

The mother closed the window and slowly sank down on a chair. But a realization of the danger threatening her son brought her quickly to her feet. She dressed hastily, wrapped her head in a shawl and ran to Feodor Mazin's. He was ill, and therefore had not gone to the factory. When she entered he was sitting at the window reading a book and nursing his right hand, the thumb of which was sticking up unnaturally. He went pale on hearing the news and jumped up.

"Think of that!" he muttered.

"What shall we do?" asked Pelagea, wiping the sweat from her brow with a trembling hand.

"Wait a minute, don't get scared," answered Feodor as he pushed back his curly hair with his sound hand.

"Why, you're scared yourself!" she cried.

"Me?" He blushed and smiled self-consciously. "Hm-m.

Damn it all. . . . We must let Pavel know. I'll send somebody. But you go home and don't worry. They won't beat us, will they?"

When she got home she gathered up all the books and began pacing the floor, clutching them to her breast as she glanced into the stove, under the stove and even into the water barrel. She imagined that Pavel would immediately rush home from the factory, but he did not come. At last, exhausted, she sat down on a bench in the kitchen with the books under her, and there she remained, afraid to move, until Pavel and the *khokhol* came home.

"Have you heard?" she cried, without getting up.

"Yes," smiled Pavel. "Are you afraid?"

"Terribly. . . ."

"You mustn't be," said the *khokhol*. "That won't help any."

"Hasn't even lighted the samovar," observed Pavel.

"On account of these," said the mother guiltily, getting up and pointing to the books.

Her son and the *khokhol* burst out laughing, and that made her feel better. Pavel selected a few of the books and took them outdoors to hide.

"There's nothing to get frightened about at all, *nenko*," said the *khokhol* as he lighted the samovar. "Only it's a damn shame people should waste their time on such foolishness. Grown men with swords at their belts and spurs on their boots. They'll come here and rummage through everything—look under the bed and under the stove, go down into the cellar and climb up into the attic. They'll get cobwebs in their faces and snort in disgust. They'll fret and be ashamed, so they'll pretend to be very ferocious and very angry. They know what a beastly job theirs is. Once they felt so embarrassed at raking over all my things that they just stopped and went away. Another time they took me along. Threw me in jail and kept me there for about four months. You don't do anything in jail but sit and wait. Then you get a summons, soldiers lead you through the streets and some big chief asks you questions. They're not a very clever lot, the chiefs—talk a lot of twaddle, then order the soldiers to take you back to jail. So they keep jerking you back and forth like that—after all, they've got to do something for the money they're paid! And in the long run they let you go free, and that's all there is to it!"

"What a way you have of talking, Andryusha!" exclaimed the mother.

He raised his red face from where he was kneeling to blow up the samovar, smoothed down his moustache and asked:

"What kind of a way?"

"As if nobody ever hurt you."

"Is there a soul unhurt anywhere on earth?" he said with a smile, getting up and shaking his head. "They've hurt me so much I don't notice it any more. What can you do about it, since people are like that? It just interferes with your work if you notice it, and it's a waste of time to brood over your hurts. That's the way life is! I used to get angry with people, but then I saw it wasn't worth while. Everybody's afraid his neighbour's going to wallop him, so he tries to catch him on the nose first. That's the way life is, *nenko* mine!"

His words flowed smoothly, driving away her fears of the coming search; his prominent eyes smiled, and she noticed how agile he was, despite his clumsiness.

The mother sighed.

"May God give you happiness, Andryusha," she said fervently.

The *khokhol* strode over to the samovar and squatted down before it again.

"If I get presented with a bit of happiness I won't refuse it," he muttered, "but I'll not go begging for it."

Pavel came in from outside.

"They'll never find them," he remarked confidently, and began to wash his hands. While he was drying them he turned to his mother:

"If you show them you're scared they'll think: must be something in this house to make her tremble so. You know we're not doing anything wrong; justice is on our side, and we'll work all our lives for its sake. That's the only thing we're guilty of, so why should we be scared?"

"I'll pull myself together, Pasha," she promised. But in the next breath she burst out miserably: "If they'd only hurry and get it over with!"

They did not come that night, and the next morning the mother anticipated the boys' jibes by being the first to laugh at herself.

"Got scared before the scare," she said.

X

The gendarmes put in their appearance almost a month after that alarming night. Nikolai Vesovshchikov had come to see Pavel and Andrei, and the three of them were discussing their newspaper. It was late—almost midnight. The mother had gone to bed, and as she dozed off she could hear their quiet, anxious voices. Then Andrei tiptoed across the kitchen and closed the door behind him. There was the sound of a pail crashing, the door was thrown open, and Andrei stepped back into the kitchen.

"Spurs are clanking!" he whispered loudly.

The mother jumped out of bed and snatched up her clothes in trembling fingers, but Pavel appeared in the doorway and said calmly:

"Go back to bed. You are ill."

A rustle was heard outside. Pavel went to the door and pushed it open, saying, "Who's there?"

A tall grey figure instantly appeared, followed by another, while two gendarmes pushed Pavel away and took up positions on either side of him.

"We're not the ones you were expecting, eh?" said a high, mocking voice.

The speaker was a lanky officer with a scanty black moustache. One of the local policemen named Fedyakin went over to the mother's bed.

"That's his mother, Your Excellency," he said, one hand touching his cap and the other pointing at Pelagea. "And that's him," he added, waving toward Pavel.

"Pavel Vlassov?" asked the officer, narrowing his eyes.

Pavel nodded.

"I am to make a search of your house," continued the officer with a twist of his moustache. "Get up, woman! Who's in there?" With a glance through the door he went into the other room.

"Your names?" came his voice.

Two witnesses came in. One of them was the old foundry hand Tveryakov, the other stoker Rybin, a heavy, swarthy fellow who rented a room in Tveryakov's house.

"Evening, Nilovna," he said to the mother in a gruff bass voice.

As she put on her clothes she tried to keep up her courage by muttering to herself:

"Never heard of such a thing! Coming in the middle of the night like this! People in bed already, and in they come!"

The room was crowded and for some reason smelled strongly of shoe polish. Two gendarmes and the local chief of police noisily took the books off the shelves and piled them on the table in front of the officer. Two others pounded the walls with their fists, glanced under the chairs, and one of them even clambered up on top of the stove. The *khokhol* and Vesovshchikov stood beside each other in one corner. Nikolai's pock-marked face broke out in red blotches, and he did not take his little grey eyes off the officer. The *khokhol* stood twisting his moustache, and when the mother entered the room he gave a short laugh and nodded his head to her encouragingly.

In order to conquer her fear she did not move sidewise as she usually did, but straight forward with her chest high, and this gave her figure an amusing air of pompousness. She stamped noisily when she walked, but her eyebrows twitched.

The officer snatched up the books with the thin fingers of his white hands, quickly leafed through them and tossed them aside with a deft movement. Some of the books fell to the floor. No one said a word. The sweating gendarmes breathed heavily, clanked their spurs, occasionally asked:

"Have you looked here?"

The mother stood against the wall next to Pavel, her arms folded like his, her eyes following the officer. She felt weak in the knees, and there was a dry film over her eyes.

"Must you throw the books on the floor?" suddenly came Nikolai's harsh voice through the silence.

The mother started. Tveryakov jerked his head as though someone had pushed it; Rybin grunted and gazed steadily at Nikolai.

The officer narrowed his eyes and darted a look at Nikolai's stony, pock-marked face. He began to finger the pages of the books more quickly. Sometimes he opened his large grey eyes very wide, as if he were suffering unbearable pain and were about to cry out in impotent protest.

"Hey, you soldier!" said Vesovshchikov again. "Pick up the books!"

All the gendarmes turned round and looked at him, then at the officer. The latter raised his head and swept Nikolai's broad figure with a withering eye.

"Hm-m-m!" he drawled through his nose. "Pick them up."

One of the gendarmes stooped and began to pick up the tattered books.

"Nikolai had better keep his mouth shut," whispered the mother to Pavel.

He shrugged his shoulders. The *khokhol* dropped his head.

"Who reads this Bible?"

"I do," answered Pavel.

"Who do all these books belong to?"

"To me," said Pavel.

"Very well," said the officer, leaning back in the chair. He cracked the fingers of his slender hands, stretched his legs under the table, stroked his moustache and said to Nikolai, "Are you Andrei Nakhodka?"

"Yes," said Nikolai, stepping forward. The *khokhol* took him by the shoulder and pushed him back.

"No, he's not. I am Andrei. . . . "

The officer raised his hand and shook his little finger at Vesovshchikov.

"You better watch your step!"

Then he began searching through his papers.

The moonlit night glanced through the window, cold and indifferent. The snow crunched under the feet of someone who slowly passed the house.

"Nakhodka. Humph! You ve done time for political offences before, haven't you?" asked the officer.

"Yes. Once in Rostov and another time in Saratov. But there the gendarmes were more polite."

The officer shut his right eye and rubbed it. Then he said, baring his small teeth:

"Do you happen to know the scum who are spreading criminal proclamations at the factory?"

The *khokhol* grinned, rocked up on his toes, and was about to answer, when the voice of Nikolai rang out again.

"We're getting our first look at scum," he said.

There was a hush. Nobody said a word for a second.

The scar on the mother's face went white and her right brow shot up. Rybin's black beard began to quiver strangely; he combed his fingers through it and dropped his eyes.

"Take that cur out of here!" cried the officer.

The two gendarmes grabbed Nikolai by the arms and pushed him roughly into the kitchen, where he forced them to halt by digging his feet into the floor.

"Wait!" he said. "I've got to put on my coat."

The chief of police came in from the garden.

"Nothing out there. We looked everywhere."

"Naturally," scoffed the officer. "We're dealing with an experienced man."

The mother listened to his weak, brittle voice and looked fearfully into his yellow face, sensing that here was a merciless foe who felt a lordly contempt for the common folk. She had rarely come into contact with such people and had almost forgotten their existence.

"So that's the sort that get upset by the leaflets," she thought.

"Andrei Onisimov, illegitimate son bearing the name of Nakhodka, you are under arrest!"

"What for?" asked the *khokhol*, unperturbed.

"You'll find that out later," said the officer with honeyed malice. "Are you literate?" he asked, turning to Pelagea.

"No, she isn't," answered Pavel.

"I'm not asking you!" retorted the officer sharply. "Speak up, woman!"

The mother was overwhelmed by hatred for this man. Suddenly she began to shiver as if she had taken a plunge into cold water; she drew herself up, her scar grew livid and her brows threatening.

"You needn't shout," she said, holding out her hand. "You're still too young to know what trouble is."

"Calm yourself, mother," said Pavel, trying to stop her.

"Wait, Pavel," she cried, and rushed to the table. "Why should you take these people?"

"That's none of your business! Silence!" shouted the officer, getting up. "Bring in Vesovshchikov, who is also under arrest!"

He began to read a paper which he held close to his nose.

Nikolai was brought in. The officer interrupted his reading to cry, "Take off your cap!"

Rybin came up to Pelagea and gave her a little push with his shoulder.

"Don't get upset, mother."

"How can I take off my cap when they're holding my arms?" asked Nikolai, drowning out the reading of the record of proceedings.

"Sign it!" cried the officer, throwing the paper on the table.

As the mother watched them sign, her fury subsided, her heart sank, and her eyes filled with tears of injury and helplessness. She had often shed such tears in the twenty years of her married life, but of late she had almost forgotten their hot sting. The officer looked at her and said with a fastidious grimace:

"Spare your tears, woman, or you won't have any left for future use."

Another wave of anger surged within her.

"A mother always has enough tears for everything, for everything! If you have a mother, she's sure to know that!"

The officer hastily put his papers away in a new brief case with a shiny lock.

"March!" he commanded.

"Good-bye, Andrei; good-bye, Nikolai!" said Pavel with quiet warmth as he shook their hands.

"You'll probably be meeting soon!" said the officer with a short laugh.

Vesovshchikov breathed heavily. The blood rose in his thick neck and his eyes glittered with hard anger. The *khokhol* flashed a smile and nodded his head, whispering something to the mother. She made the sign of the cross. "God sees who is right," she said.

At last the men in grey uniforms crowded out on to the porch and disappeared with a clanking of spurs. Rybin was the last to leave. He gave Pavel a lingering look.

"Well, good-bye," he said thoughtfully, and went through the door, coughing into his beard.

Pavel clasped his hands behind his back and slowly paced the floor, stepping over the books and linen scattered there.

"See? That's how they do it," he said gloomily.

His mother looked incredulously at the chaos.

"Why did Nikolai have to be so pert?" she asked regretfully.

"Because he was scared, I guess," answered Pavel.

"In they come, snatch them up and take them away—just like that!" she murmured, wringing her hands.

Her son had not been arrested, so her heart beat more calmly. But her thoughts were paralyzed by the incongruity of what she had witnessed.

"He sneered at us, that yellow-faced fellow. Tried to scare us. . . ."

"All right, Mummy," said Pavel with sudden determination. "Come, let's clear this away."

He called her "Mummy," and his tone was the one he used when he felt drawn to her. She went over to him and looked into his face.

"Have they hurt you?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," he answered. "It's hard. I wish they had taken me along with the others."

She thought she saw tears in his eyes.

"Just wait, they'll take you too," she said with a sigh, hoping to make him feel easier.

"I know they will," he replied.

She was silent a moment.

"What a hard one you are, Pavel!" she said at last. "If only you'd comfort me once in a while! It was bad enough for me to say such a thing without your making it worse!"

He glanced up and came over.

"I don't know how, mother. You'll have to get used to it."

She sighed and tried to keep her voice from breaking as she asked, after a short pause:

"Do they torture people? Tear their bodies and break their bones? Whenever I think of that—it's so awful. . . ."

"They break your soul. That hurts worse, when they lay their filthy hands on your soul. . . ."

XI

The following day it became known that they had arrested Bukin, Samoilov, Somov and five others as well. Feodor Mazin dropped in during the evening. His house had been searched too, and he was very much pleased, feeling quite heroic.

"Were you afraid, Feodor?" asked the mother.

He paled, his features sharpened, and his nostrils quivered.

"I was afraid the officer would strike me. He was fat, with a black beard and hairy fingers and black glasses on his nose, as if he was blind. He shouted and stamped his foot. 'I'll throw you in jail!' he shouted. Nobody ever beat me, not even my mother or father. I was their only son and they loved me."

He shut his eyes for a moment and compressed his lips, pushing back his hair with a quick movement of both hands. Then he said, looking at Pavel with red-rimmed eyes:

"If anybody ever dares strike me I'll throw myself into him like a knife. I'll bite him with my teeth. Let them kill me right away and get it over with."

"You're too skinny for that," exclaimed the mother. "Not much of a fighter, I'd say."

"But I'll fight anyway," answered Feodor under his breath.

"He'll be the first to break," she said to Pavel when Feodor had gone.

Pavel made no reply.

In a few minutes the kitchen door opened slowly and Rybin came in.

"Hullo," he said with a short laugh. "Here I am again. Last night they brought me, and today I've come of my own accord." He shook Pavel's hand warmly and put a hand on Pelagea's shoulder.

"I'd like a glass of tea," he said.

Pavel silently studied his broad swarthy face with its thick black beard and dark eyes. There was something significant in his steady gaze.

The mother went into the kitchen to heat the samovar. Rybin sat down, put his elbows on the table, and looked at Pavel.

"Well," he said, as though continuing an interrupted conversation, "I have to be frank with you. Been keeping an eye on you for some time. Live almost next door. I noticed that a lot of people come to your house, but they don't drink or brawl. That's the first thing. You're sure to notice people who behave themselves. Makes you wonder what's wrong. I too am an eyesore—keeping to myself the way I do."

His speech was heavy, but flowed freely. He stroked his beard with a dark hand and gazed intently into Pavel's face.

"People've started talking about you. My landlord, for instance. Calls you a heretic because you don't go to church. I don't either. Then those leaflets. That your doing?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"What are you saying?" cried his mother in alarm, thrusting her head through the kitchen-door. "You aren't the only one!"

Pavel laughed and so did Rybin.

"All right," said Rybin.

The mother sniffed and went away, somewhat piqued by the way they ignored her words.

"A good idea, those leaflets. Stir the people up. Nineteen of them, weren't there?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"That means I read them all. Some of the things in them aren't clear, some are unnecessary, but when a person has a lot to say it's hard not to put in an extra word or two."

Rybin smiled, revealing strong white teeth.

"Then came the search. That won me over most of all. You and the *khokhol* and Nikolai—all of you showed . . ."

He stopped, groping for the right words, staring out of the window and tapping the table with his fingers.

"Showed the stand you had taken; sort of: 'You go on with your business, Your Excellency, and we'll go on with ours.' The *khokhol*'s a fine chap too. Sometimes when I hear him talking at the factory I say to myself: 'No breaking him. Only death will break him. Made all of gristle.' Do you trust me, Pavel?"

"I do," said Pavel, nodding.

"Good! Look at me—forty years old—twice as old as you, and seen twenty times as much. Was a soldier for more than three years. Got married twice—the first one died, I chucked the second. Been in the Caucasus and seen the Dukhobortsy.* They don't know how to cope with life, brother, not them!"

The mother eagerly listened to his pithy speech; it pleased her that this middle-aged man should unbosom himself to her son. But she felt that Pavel's manner was too dry, and she tried to make up for it by being hospitable.

"Perhaps you'd like a bite to eat, Mikhailo Ivanovich?" she said.

"Thank you, mother. I've had my supper. So you think life's not what it should be, Pavel?"

Pavel got up and began walking up and down, his hands behind his back.

---

* A religious sect.—*Trans.*

"It's taking the right course," he answered. "Didn't it bring you to me with an open heart? Little by little it's uniting us working people, and the time will come when it will unite everybody. Life is hard and unfair to us, but it is opening our eyes to its bitter meaning and showing us how to make things move faster."

"Right you are!" put in Rybin. "People need a good overhauling. If a fellow gets lousy, take him to the bathhouse, give him a good scrubbing and put him into clean clothes. Then he'll be presentable again. But how can you clean up a fellow inside? That's the thing!"

Pavel spoke excitedly about the factory and the bosses and how the workers abroad were fighting for their rights. Sometimes Rybin struck the table as if punctuating Pavel's speech.

"That's the thing!" he would explain.

And once he laughed and remarked quietly:

"You're young yet! Don't know much about people."

"Let's not talk about being old or young," said Pavel seriously, coming to a halt in front of Rybin. "Let's see whose ideas are right."

"So you think they've been fooling us about God too? Hm. I too think our religion's no good."

Here the mother broke in. Whenever her son spoke about God and things associated with her faith in Him, a faith she held dear and sacred, she tried to catch his eye, silently pleading with him not to wound her heart with sharp words of unbelief. But behind his unbelief she sensed a faith, and this comforted her.

"How can I understand his thoughts?" she would muse.

She had supposed this middle-aged man would be equally offended by her son's words. But when Rybin calmly asked Pavel this question, she could not restrain herself.

"When it comes to the Lord, you better mind what you say!" She took a deep breath, and went on with added fervour. "You can think what you like, but for me, an old woman, there'll be nothing to turn to for support in my grief if you take the Lord God away!"

Her eyes filled with tears and her fingers trembled as she washed the dishes.

"You didn't understand us," Pavel said gently.

"Excuse us, mother," said Rybin in his deep, slow voice. He gave a short laugh and glanced at Pavel.

"I forgot you were too old to have your warts cut out!"

"I wasn't talking about the kind and merciful God you believe in," continued Pavel, "but about the one the priests threaten us with, as if he were a club; the one in whose name they try to make all people bow down to the evil will of the few."

"That's what!" exclaimed Rybin, striking the table. "They've pawned a false God off on us! Fight us with everything they can lay their hands on! Think this over, mother: God created man in His own image, which means He resembles man, if man resembles Him. But we're more like wild beasts than gods. The churches shake a scarecrow at us. Got to change our God, mother. Got to clean Him up, too! They've dressed Him up in lies and slander; mutilated the face of Him to kill our souls."

He spoke softly, but every one of his words was a stunning blow to the mother. And she was frightened by his large funereal face in the black frame of his beard. She could not bear the dark shine of his eyes, which made her heart ache with fear.

"I shall go away," she said, shaking her head. "It's beyond my strength to listen to such talk."

Quickly she went into the kitchen.

"See, Pavel?" said Rybin. "It's not the head, but the heart that's the centre of things. It occupies a very special place in the human soul, and nothing else will grow there."

"Only reason can free man," said Pavel firmly.

"Reason doesn't give him strength," insisted Rybin loudly. "It's his heart gives him strength, not his head!"

The mother undressed and went to bed without saying her prayers. She felt cold and miserable. Rybin, who had seemed so clever and had impressed her so at first, now roused her hostility.

"The heretic! The rebel!" she thought as she listened to his voice. "Why did he have to come here?"

But he continued speaking with calm confidence.

"Can't leave the holy place empty. The place God holds in the human heart is the tenderest spot. If you cut it out, it'll leave a wound this big. Have to think up a new faith, Pavel. Have to create a god who is a friend to man, that's it!"

"There was Christ!" exclaimed Pavel.

"Christ was weak. 'Let this cup pass from me,' he said. And he recognized Caesar. How could God recognize a man's power over his creatures? He Himself is all power! He couldn't divide up His soul—this is God's, this is Man's. But Christ wasn't against trade and he wasn't against marriage. And he was wrong to curse the fig tree—was the fig tree to blame for not bearing fruit? No more than the human soul is to blame for not bearing forth goodness. Have I myself planted this evil in my soul?"

The two voices kept coming to grips in the room, wrestling in excited contest. The floor creaked as Pavel walked back and forth. When Pavel spoke, all other sounds were drowned out, but when Rybin spoke in his calm, deep voice, the mother could hear the swinging of the pendulum and the clawing of the frost at the walls of the house.

"I'll put it in my own words—a stoker's words: God is a flame. And he lives in the heart. It's been said: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' So the Word is the Spirit."

"The Word is Reason," insisted Pavel.

"All right. Then God is in the heart and in the Reason—but not in the church. The church is God's tomb."

The mother fell asleep and did not hear Rybin leave.

He became a frequent visitor thereafter. If any of Pavel's comrades were there when he came, Rybin would sit in a corner and say nothing, except to put in an occasional "That's what!"

One day he swept the company with his dark glance and said sullenly, "Have to speak about things as they are, and not as they will be. Who knows what they will be? Once the people get their freedom, they'll decide what's best for them. They've had enough stuff pounded into their heads without their asking. Time they had a chance to do their own thinking. Maybe they'll want to reject everything—the whole of life and of learning. Maybe they'll see it's their enemy, like the church God. Put the books in their hands and they'll find their own answers. That's what!"

When he and Pavel were alone, they entered into endless discussions, during which they never lost their tempers. The mother anxiously listened to them, following every word, striving to grasp what they were saying. Sometimes she felt that both the broad-shouldered, black-bearded man and her strong, tall son had become blind. They groped first in one direction, then in another, searching for a way out, grasping everything in strong but unseeing fingers, moving from place to place, dropping things on the floor and crushing them underfoot. They bumped into things, felt them, tossed them away without losing their faith or their hope.

They taught her to listen to words awesome for their frankness and daring, but these words no longer struck her with the force they had that first time. She had learned to resist them. Sometimes behind the words denying God, she could detect a firm faith in Him. Then she smiled a quiet, all-forgiving smile. And while she did not like Rybin, he no longer roused her hostility.

Every week she took books and clean clothes to the jail for the *khokhol*. Once she was allowed to see him.

"He hasn't changed a bit," she said tenderly when she returned. "So good to everybody, and everybody joking with him. It's hard for him, awfully hard, but he doesn't show it."

"That's right," was Rybin's comment. "Grief's a hide and we're inside. We're used to such clothing. Nothing to be proud of. Not everybody has had blinders put on his eyes. Some people just close their eyes, that's what! So if we're stupid, nothing to do but grin and bear it!"

XII

The settlement became more and more interested in the Vlassovs' little grey house. This interest was tinged with suspicion and unconscious hostility, but a trusting curiosity was also aroused. Sometimes Pavel would be approached by a stranger who, after glancing about stealthily, would say, "Listen, brother, you read books and know the law, couldn't you explain to me. . . ."

And the petitioner would recount some tale of injustice on the part of the police or the factory management. In complicated cases, Pavel would give him a note to a lawyer of his acquaintance in the town. But if he could, he would explain the matter himself.

Gradually people came to respect this earnest young man who spoke so simply and daringly, who kept his eyes open and his ears alert to everything, who stubbornly went to the bottom of every disagreement, always and everywhere finding the common thread linking all people.

Pavel won particular prestige after the incident with the "swamp kopek."

A large swamp overgrown with firs and birches lay beyond the factory, nearly encircling it in a festering ring. In the summer this swamp exuded thick yellow vapours and sent off clouds of mosquitoes that spread fever in the settlement. The swamp belonged to the factory, and the new director decided to drain it in order to extract the peat and make profit from the land. On the pretext of doing this for the sake of improving living conditions for the workers, he gave an order to deduct one kopek from each ruble paid in wages for the draining of the swamp.

The workers grew indignant. They particularly objected to the fact that no deductions were made from the wages of white-collar employees.

Illness had kept Pavel at home on the Saturday when the announcement of the kopek deduction was posted by the director, so he knew nothing about it. On the next day he was visited by Sizov, a respectable old foundry hand, and Makhotin, a tall grouchy mechanic, who told him about the director's decision.

"The older ones of us got together," said Sizov impressively, "and talked the matter over. The comrades decided to send us to you as a knowing person to find out whether there's any law letting a director fight mosquitoes with our kopeks."

"Look," said Makhotin, his narrow eyes flashing, "four years ago the skinflints took our money for a bathhouse.

Three thousand eight hundred rubles they collected! And where are they now? We never saw the bathhouse!"

Pavel explained the injustice of the deduction and the obvious profit the draining would bring the factory. The two men went away frowning. When the mother had seen them out, she said with a short laugh, "Even the old men have started looking up to you."

Without answering her, Pavel sat down and began to write. In a few minutes he said, "I have a request to make of you, mother. Please go to town and deliver this note."

"Is it dangerous?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm sending you to the place where they print our newspaper. We've got to get the story about the swamp kopek into the next issue at any cost."

"Very well," she said, "I'll go."

This was the first task her son had ever entrusted her with. She was happy because he was so frank with her.

"I understand, Pasha," she said as she was getting dressed. "It's sheer robbery! What's that man's name—Yegor Ivanovich?"

She returned home late in the evening, tired but pleased.

"I saw Sasha," she told her son. "She sends her regards. Yegor Ivanovich is a simple sort, and very jolly. Has a funny way of talking."

"I'm glad you liked them," said Pavel softly.

"They're simple people, Pasha. It's a good thing when people don't put on airs. And they think a lot of you."

On Monday Pavel stayed home again, since he had not fully recovered. At dinnertime Feodor Mazin came running in all out of breath, happy and excited.

"Come on!" he cried. "The whole factory's up in arms. They sent me for you. Sizov and Makhotin said you could explain things better than anyone else. You should see what's happening!"

Without a word Pavel began putting on his clothes.

"The womenfolk have come and added their squeals."

"I'm coming too," said the mother. "What are they up to? I'm coming too!"

"Come along," said Pavel.

They walked swiftly and silently down the street. The mother could scarcely breathe in her excitement; she felt that something of the greatest importance was about to happen. At the factory gates stood a crowd of women who were shouting and quarrelling. When the three of them slipped into the yard, they found themselves in the midst of a dark throng roaring with excitement. The mother noticed that all heads were turned to the wall of the foundry where Sizov, Makhotin, Vyalov and some five or six of the more influential workers were standing on a pile of old iron against the background of the brick wall.

"Here comes Vlassov!" someone shouted.

"Vlassov? Let him come over here!"

"Quiet!" shouted several voices.

From somewhere close at hand came the level voice of Rybin.

"It's not for the kopek we have to fight, but for justice, that's what! It's not our kopek we hold so dear—it's no rounder than any other, though it's heavier—has more human blood in it than the director's ruble! The value lies not in the kopek, but in the blood, in the justice."

His words fell among the crowd, chipping off sharp exclamations:

"Right you are, Rybin!"

"Well put, stoker!"

"Here's Vlassov!"

The voices merged in a roar of sound that drowned out the rumble of the machines, the hissing of steam and humming of wires. People came running from all directions, waving their arms, inciting each other with stinging words. The discontent always smouldering in weary breasts now came to life and demanded an outlet; it soared triumphantly into the air, spreading its dark wings wider and wider, tightening its hold on people and pitching them against each other as it transformed itself into a vengeful flame. Above the throng rose a cloud of dust and soot, sweaty faces glowed with excitement, cheeks were stained by black tears, eyes and teeth flashed in grimy faces.

Pavel appeared on the pile of iron where Sizov and Makhotin were standing.

"Comrades!" he cried.

The mother noticed how pale his face was, and that his lips were trembling; involuntarily she moved forward, pushing through the crowd.

"Stop shoving," they shouted at her irritably.

She was pushed in her turn, but this did not stop her. She worked herself forward with shoulders and elbows, urged by the desire to stand next to her son.

When Pavel had uttered that word which to him was full of profound significance, he felt his throat contract in a spasm of joy. He was seized by the desire to offer his heart to these people, a heart aflame with dreams of justice.

"Comrades!" he exclaimed, drawing from the syllables his strength and his ecstasy. "We are the people who build churches and factories, who forge chains and mint money. We are that living force by which all are fed and kept alive, from the cradle to the grave!"

"That's right!" cried Rybin.

"Always and everywhere we are the first to work and the last to get any consideration. Who cares about us? Who has ever done the slightest thing for us? Does anyone even look on us as human beings? No!"

"No!" came an echoing voice.

As he got under way, Pavel began to speak more simply and calmly, and the crowd slowly drew closer, merging into a single, thousand-headed body which looked up into his face with its myriad of attentive eyes, drinking in his every word.

"We'll never win a better lot for ourselves until we realize that we're all comrades, a family of friends bound together by the single desire to fight for our rights."

"Come to the point!" cried someone standing near the mother in a rough voice.

"Don't interrupt!" came two voices from different sides.

The grimy faces frowned with sullen scepticism, but many eyes searched Pavel's face thoughtfully.

"A Socialist, but no fool!" observed someone.

"Talking up bold, isn't he?" said a tall one-eyed worker, giving the mother a nudge.

"It's time for us to realize, comrades, that no one will help us but ourselves. All for one and one for all—that's our motto if we want to lick our enemies."

"He's speaking the truth, fellows!" called out Makhotin, shaking his fist in the air.

"Call the director!" continued Pavel.

It was as though a sudden blast of wind struck the crowd. It swayed, and dozens of voices cried out:

"Call the director!"

"Send a delegation for him!"

The mother pushed even further forward and gazed up at her son, her face full of pride. Her Pavel was standing there among these old respected workers and everyone was listening to and agreeing with him. She was glad he did not become angry and swear as the others did.

Like hail on a tin roof came the oaths and exclamations and biting words. Pavel looked down on the people and seemed to be searching for something with his large eyes.

"Delegates?"

"Sizov!"

"Vlassov!"

"Rybin! He's got a sharp set of teeth!"

Suddenly hushed exclamations were heard among the crowd.

"He's coming of his own accord!"

"The director!"

The crowd made way for a tall man with a pointed beard and a long face.

"Allow me," he said, waving the workers out of his way with a slight gesture, designed not to touch them. His eyes were narrowed and he searched the faces of the workers with the experienced glance of a master of men. People snatched off their caps and bowed, but he pushed on without returning their bows, sowing silence and confusion among the people who smiled in embarrassment and gave hushed exclamations voicing the repentance of children caught in mischief.

He passed the mother, his hard eyes sliding over her face, and stopped in front of the pile of iron. Someone extended a hand to help him, but he ignored it. With a strong movement he climbed up and stood in front of Pavel and Sizov.

"What sort of gathering is this? Why have you stopped work?"

There was silence for a few seconds. The heads of the people swayed like ears of corn. Sizov waved his cap, shrugged his shoulders and dropped his head.

"Answer my question!" shouted the director.

Pavel came up to him and said in a loud voice, pointing to Sizov and Rybin:

"We three have been delegated by our comrades to demand that you revoke your order about the deducting of kopeks."

"Why?" asked the director without glancing at Pavel.

"Because we consider such a deduction unfair," said Pavel loudly.

"Do you think my intention of draining the swamp is prompted by the desire to exploit the workers, rather than to improve their living conditions? Is that it?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"And you too?" asked the director, turning to Rybin.

"All of us think the same."

"And you, my good man?" turning to Sizov.

"Me too. We'd like to keep our kopeks."

Sizov once more dropped his head and smiled guiltily.

The director slowly swept the crowd with his eyes and shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned to Pavel and looked at him intently.

"You seem to be a person of some education. Is it possible that you too do not realize the advantages of such a measure?"

"If the factory drained the swamp at its own expense, anyone could realize the advantages," answered Pavel in a voice to be heard by all.

"The factory is not a philanthropic organization," remarked the director dryly. "I order you back to your jobs!"

He started to climb down, carefully feeling the iron with his foot and not glancing at anyone.

A hum of discontent rose from the crowd.

"What is it?" asked the director, stopping where he was.

A distant voice broke the silence.

"Go work yourself!"

"If you are not back on the job in fifteen minutes, I shall order all of you to be fined," said the director with curt emphasis.

Once more he made his way through the crowd, but a dull roar rose as he retreated, and the further he went, the louder it became.

"Try and talk to him!"

"There's your justice for you! What a life!"

They turned to Pavel and shouted:

"What're we supposed to do now, professor?"

"You made a fine speech, but a lot of good it did when the boss showed his face!"

"Come on, Vlassov, tell us what to do."

As the cries grew more insistent, Pavel said:

"I suggest that we quit work until he promises to stop deducting the kopeks, comrades."

The comments leaped up excitedly:

"Take us for a bunch of fools?"

"That means a strike!"

"For the sake of a couple of measly kopeks?"

"What's wrong with a strike?"

"We'd all get fired!"

"Who'll do the work for him?"

"He'll find plenty who are willing!"

"You mean stinkers?"

XIII

Pavel climbed down and stood beside his mother.

The crowd was stirred up; everyone was arguing and shouting excitedly.

"You'll never get them to strike," said Rybin, coming over to Pavel. "They're greedy, but they're yellow! No more than three hundred'll back you up. Too big a pile of manure to lift on one pitchfork. . . ."

Pavel was silent. The huge dark face of the crowd swayed before him, searching his eyes in insistent demand. His heart beat in alarm. It seemed to him that his words had disappeared without leaving a trace, like single drops of rain falling on parched soil.

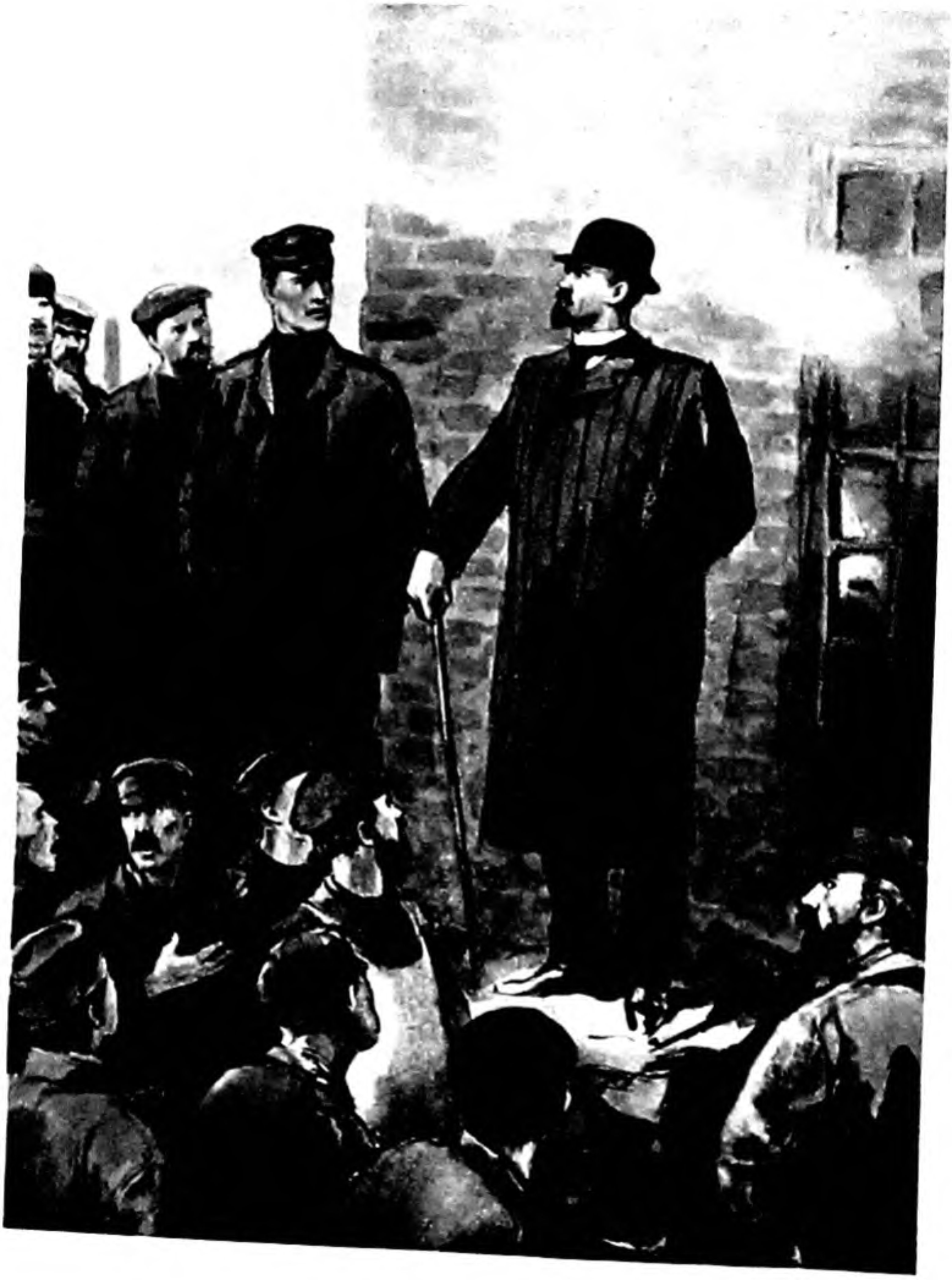
He returned home tired and crestfallen. His mother and Sizov walked behind, while Rybin strode beside him and kept buzzing in his ear.

"You speak well, but you don't touch the heart! That's what! You have to speak to their hearts—throw the spark in the very centre. You can't convince people by reasoning with them. The shoe doesn't fit the foot—too tight, too narrow!"

"It's time for us old people to be making our way to the graveyard, Pelagea!" Sizov was saying. "A new sort of people is growing up. How did we live, you and me? Crawling on our knees, knocking our heads against the ground bowing to our betters. But nowadays—I don't know, maybe people have come to their senses, maybe they're making an even worse mistake, but at least they're not like us. Take the young folks—they talk to the director as if they were his equals. . . . Well, I'll see you later, Pavel Mikhailovich. It's good the way you stand up for people, young man. May the Lord help you. Perhaps you'll find a way out of it all yet. God bless you."

And he walked away.

"Go ahead and die off," muttered Rybin. "People like him aren't even human beings—just putty—something to stop up the cracks with. Notice who shouted to make you a delegate, Pavel? Those who spread the rumours you are a Socialist and a troublemaker. They're the ones!



Think to themselves: 'He'll get fired—serve him right.'"

"From their point of view, they did the right thing," said Pavel.

"And the wolves are right when they tear their brothers to pieces."

Rybin's face was clouded and his voice showed that he was upset.

"People won't listen to bare words—got to suffer—got to drench your words in blood. . . ."

All day Pavel wandered about tired and gloomy and strangely troubled, with burning eyes that seemed to be searching for something. The mother noticed this.

"What's the matter, Pasha?" she asked warily.

"I've got a headache," he answered.

"Lie down and I'll call the doctor."

"No, don't bother," he hastened to reply. Then he added under his breath, "I'm too young and weak, that's the trouble! They didn't believe me, didn't take up my cause, which means I didn't know how to put it. I'm sick and disgusted with myself."

She gazed into his brooding face and sought to comfort him.

"Just wait a bit," she said softly. "What they didn't understand today they will tomorrow."

"They've *got* to understand!" he exclaimed.

"Even I can see you're right."

Pavel went over to her.

"You're wonderful, mother," he said, and turned away. She started up as though seared by his quiet words, then pressed her hand to her heart, cherishing his tenderness, and left him.

That night when she was already asleep and he was lying in bed reading, the gendarmes came and began to rummage angrily through the house, up in the attic and out in the garden. The yellow-faced officer acted just as he had the first time—offensively sarcastic, taking pleasure in jibes aimed at their very hearts. The mother sat silent in a corner without taking her eyes off her son's face. He tried not to betray his feelings, but his fingers twitched when the officer laughed; she knew what it cost him to keep still when the gendarme cracked his jokes. It was not so frightening for her this time as it had been the first; her hate for these grey, nocturnal visitors had grown, and this hate consumed her fear.

"They'll take me," Pavel managed to whisper to her.

"I know," she answered softly, bowing her head.

She realized they would put him in jail for what he had said to the workers earlier in the day. But everyone agreed with what he had said, so they would surely rise to his defence. They dared not keep him long.

She wanted to throw her arms about him and cry, but the officer was standing beside her, watching her with narrowed eyes. His lips and his moustache twitched, and it seemed to Pelagea that this man was just waiting for her tears and complaints and entreaties. Gathering all her strength, she gripped her son's hand and said slowly and softly, with bated breath:

"Good-bye, Pasha. Have you taken everything you need?"

"Yes. Don't lose heart."

"God be with you. . . ."

After they had led him away she sank down on a bench and moaned softly. She sat with her back to the wall as her husband had been wont to sit, tight with grief and the painful consciousness of her helplessness. Throwing back her head she gave a long, low cry, into which she poured all the pain of her wounded heart, while her mind was haunted by the mask-like yellow face with its thin moustache and narrowed eyes gleaming with pleasure. Within her breast gathered a dark cloud of bitterness and hatred for people who deprive mothers of their sons simply because the sons seek justice.

It was cold and rain beat at the windows. It seemed to her that grey figures with long arms and eyeless red faces were pacing like sentinels round her house in the night, their spurs clanking faintly.

"If only they had taken me too!" she thought.

The whistle blew, summoning people to work. It sounded low and hoarse and uncertain this morning. The door opened and Rybin came in.

"Did they take him?" he asked, wiping the rain off his beard.

"Yes, they did, curse them," she answered with a sigh.

"Might have expected it." He laughed briefly. "They searched my place too. Felt everything with their fingers. Did a lot of swearing, but little harm. So they've taken Pavel! The director winks, the gendarme nods, and—another person gone! Work together fine. One of them holds the people by the horns while the other milks them dry."

"You ought to stand up for Pavel!" the mother cried, getting up. "What he did was for the sake of everybody!"

"Who ought to?"

"Everybody!"

"Hm! So that's the way you feel! But that'll never happen!"

With a laugh he lumbered out, and his hopeless words left the mother more miserable than ever.

"What if they beat him—torture him. . . ."

She imagined her son's body bruised and bloody after a beating, and cold fear gripped her heart. Her eyes hurt.

That day she did not light the stove, did not get dinner, did not even drink tea. Late in the evening she ate a piece of bread. When she went to bed that night she felt that life had never been so empty and lonely. In the last few years she had grown used to living in the constant expectation of something fine and important. She had been surrounded by the cheerful, noisy activities of young people, while the earnest face of her son, who was responsible for that good but dangerous life, had always been before her. Now that he was gone, everything was gone.

XIV

The next day and another sleepless night dragged out, but even more slowly passed the following day. She expected someone to come, but no one did. Evening came. Night set in. A cold rain sighed and swished against the walls, the wind whistled down the chimney and something stirred under the floor. Drops of water dripped off the roof, and the dreary sound of their falling merged strangely with the ticking of the clock. The whole house seemed to be swaying gently; sorrow made all things look dead and useless. There was a knock at the window. Then another. She was used to such knocks; they did not frighten her, but this time she gave a little start of joy. Vague hopes lifted her quickly to her feet. Throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she opened the door.

Samoilov came in, followed by someone else whose face was concealed by an upturned coat collar and a cap pulled down over his brow.

"Did we wake you up?" asked Samoilov, without further greeting. In contrast to his usual manner, his voice was anxious and gloomy.

"I wasn't asleep," she answered and stood watching them expectantly.

Samoilov's companion breathed raucously as he took off his cap and held out his stubby hand.

"Hullo, mother! Don't you remember me?" he asked, as if he were an old friend.

"Is it you?" exclaimed Pelagea happily. "Yegor Ivanovich?"

"The very one!" he answered, bending his large head covered with hair as long as a psalmodist's. There was a smile on his face, and his little grey eyes glanced kindly at the mother. He looked for all the world like a samovar—round and small, with a thick neck and short arms. His face shone, and he breathed loudly, with something rattling and wheezing deep down in his chest.

"Step into the other room while I get dressed," said the mother.

"We have something to ask you," said Samoilov anxiously, as he glanced at her from under his brows.

Yegor Ivanovich went into the other room and began speaking from there.

"This morning Nikolai Ivanovich was released from jail, mother . . ." he began.

"I didn't know he was in jail," interrupted the mother.

"For two months and eleven days. He saw the *khokhol* there, who sends his regards; so does Pavel, and he says you mustn't worry. He wants you to know that anyone who chooses the path he has chosen is sure to be granted the pleasure of having periodic holidays in jail—that's guaranteed by the thoughtfulness of our bosses. And now I'll get down to business, mother. Do you know how many people were arrested yesterday?"

"Why—was anyone—besides Pavel?" exclaimed the mother.

"He was the forty-ninth," interrupted Yegor Ivanovich calmly. "And the management will probably have another dozen arrested. This young man here, for instance."

"Yes, me too," said Samoilov gloomily.

For some reason Pelagea found it easier to breathe.

"At least he's not alone there," was the thought that flashed through her mind.

When she was dressed she joined her guests, smiling at them cheerfully.

"I don't suppose they'll keep them long, if they took so many."

"Of course they won't!" said Yegor Ivanovich. "And if we can only spoil this show for them, they'll have to retreat with their tails between their legs. Here's the point: if we stop distributing leaflets at the factory, the gendarmes will seize the circumstance and use it against Pavel and ye noble comrades pining in bondage."

"What do you mean?" cried the mother in alarm.

"It's simple enough," answered Yegor Ivanovich calmly. "Sometimes even gendarmes are able to reason. Think it out for yourself: Pavel was free—there were papers and leaflets; Pavel is jailed—there are no more papers or leaflets. Ergo, he sowed the papers and leaflets, is't not so? And they'll begin gobbling up everybody. Gendarmes have a habit of devouring people completely, so that nothing but crumbs remains."

"I understand," said the mother sadly. "Dear me! What can we do about it?"

"They've caught almost everybody, devil take them," came Samoilov's voice from the kitchen. "We have to keep the work going now not only for the sake of our cause, but to save our comrades as well."

"And there's no one to work," added Yegor with a short laugh. "We have plenty of first-class literature, all my handiwork; but how to get it into the factory remains an unsolved problem."

"They've started searching everybody at the entrance gates," said Samoilov.

The mother sensed that they were expecting something of her.

"How can it be done?" she asked hurriedly.

Samoilov appeared in the doorway.

"Are you acquainted with the peddler Korsunova, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Have a talk with her. Maybe she'll take them in."

The mother dismissed the idea with a wave of her hand.

"Oh no! She's a gossip! Soon as they learn that she got them through me—that they came from this house—oh no!" Then she added with sudden inspiration, "Give them to me! I'll do it. I'll find a way. I'll ask Maria to take me on as a helper. I have to earn my bread somehow. I'll take dinners to sell at the factory. I'll manage."

Pressing her hands to her breast she hastily assured them that she would do everything very well, without attracting attention, and in conclusion, she added ecstatically, "Let them see that Pavel's hands reach beyond the jail! Let them see that!"

The three of them brightened up.

"Wonderful, mother! You don't even know how splendid it is! Simply stupendous!" said Yegor, smiling and rubbing his hands together.

"I'll go to jail as easy as going to bed if this works," observed Samoilov, also rubbing his hands together.

"You're the fairest damosel in the realm!" cried Yegor hoarsely.

The mother smiled. It was clear to her that if the leaflets kept appearing at the factory, the management could not blame her son for them. She felt that she was capable of coping with the task and twitched all over with joy.

"When you visit Pavel in jail, tell him he has a fine mother," said Yegor.

"I'll be seeing him first," laughed Samoilov.

"Tell him I'll do everything that has to be done—let him know that."

"What if they don't send Samoilov to jail?" asked Yegor.

"It can't be helped," she said.

The two men burst out laughing, and she too began to laugh shyly, and a bit archly.

"It's hard to see other people's troubles for your own," she said, dropping her eyes.

"That's only natural," exclaimed Yegor. "And don't you mope and pine for Pavel. He'll come back from jail even better. A man gets a good rest there and a chance to study, and people like us have no time to do either when we're at large. I've been in three times, and each time with great profit to heart and mind, though I could hardly say it was a pleasure."

"You have a hard time breathing," she observed with a friendly glance into his plain face.

"There's a very special reason for that," he replied, lifting a finger. "Well, then, I suppose everything's settled, mother? Tomorrow we'll bring you the leaflets and once more the wheel will start turning, grinding away the darkness of the ages. Three cheers for freedom of speech, and three cheers for the heart of a mother! Till we meet again!"

"Good-bye," said Samoilov, shaking her hand. "I could never have suggested such a thing to *my* mother."

"They'll all understand some day," said Pelagea, wanting to cheer him.

When they had left she locked the door and knelt in the centre of the room, mingling her prayers with the sound of the rain. She prayed without words, with only her concentrated anxiety for the people whom Pavel had introduced into her life. They seemed to move between her and the icons—all these simple people so closely related, yet each so alone.

Early in the morning she went to visit Maria Korsunova.

The peddler, as greasy and noisy as ever, greeted her sympathetically.

"Downhearted?" she asked, slapping the mother on the shoulder with a greasy hand. "Don't give in! Grabbed him and took him away, did they? That's all right. Nothing to be ashamed of! Used to be they put folks in jail for stealing, but nowadays they put them in for sticking up for the right. Maybe Pavel didn't say just what he'd ought to, but what he did was for everybody's sake, and everybody knows it, so don't you worry. Even if they don't admit it, anybody can tell the good from the bad. I wanted to come see you but there wasn't time. All day long cooking and peddling, but you'll see—I'll die a beggar yet! It's the lovers eat me up—something awful! Nipping me here, nipping me there, like cockroaches after a loaf. Just when I manage to save ten rubles, along comes some bastard and snaps it up. It's a sad thing to be born a woman! The last thing I'd wish anybody on this earth! Live alone—what for? Get a man—done for!"

"I've come to ask you to take me on as a helper," said Pelagea, interrupting her chatter.

"What's that?" asked Maria. When Pelagea had explained, Maria nodded.

"Sure," she said. "Remember how you used to hide me from my man? Now I'll hide you from hunger. Everybody ought to help you because your son got taken up for the general good. He's a fine fellow, everybody says that, and they all feel sorry for him. Believe me, no good will come to the bosses for these arrests. Just look what's happening at the factory. Bad business, deary. Those bosses think if they snap at a fellow's heels he'll stop running. But it turns out they strike down a dozen, and a whole hundred rush against them!"

As a result of this conversation the mother appeared at the factory at noon the next day with two basketfuls of Maria's food, while the peddler herself went to trade at the market.

XV

The workers instantly spotted the new peddler.

"Gone into business, Pelagea?" they asked, with an approving nod.

Some of them hastened to assure her that Pavel would soon be released. Others offered her words of sympathy. Still others savagely cursed the director and the gendarmes, and this found an echo in her own heart. There were people who looked at her with a kind of gloating satisfaction, and Isai Gorbov, the timekeeper, muttered through clenched teeth:

"If I was the governor I'd hang your son! Serve him right for leading the people astray!"

This evil threat chilled her to the bone. She did not answer Isai; she merely glanced into his small, freckled face and dropped her eyes with a sigh.

The factory was full of unrest. The workers gathered in little groups and whispered among themselves. Worried foremen poked about everywhere. Oaths were heard, and sardonic laughter.

Two policemen led Samoilov past her; he walked with one hand in his pocket and the other pushing back his red hair.

Some hundred workmen trailed them, shouting oaths and jibes at the policemen.

"Out for a walk, Samoilov?" cried someone.

"They're doing us honour these days," added another. "Give us a guard to keep us company on our strolls."

This was followed by a vicious oath.

"Looks as if it didn't pay to catch thieves any longer," called out a tall, one-eyed worker. "So they've started catching honest people!"

"You'd think they'd at least have the decency to catch them at night," came a voice from the crowd. "But here they go in broad daylight, the bastards!"

The policemen frowned and walked quickly, trying not to notice anything and pretending not to hear the epithets hurled at them. Three workmen barged into them with a large sheet of metal.

"Make way, fishermen!" they shouted.

Samoilov nodded to the mother as he passed.

"Off we go!" he observed with a grin.

She bowed to him in silence. She was deeply touched by these honest, sober young people going off to jail with a smile on their lips, and her heart swelled with a mother's love and compassion.

When she came back from the factory she spent the rest of the day with Maria, helping her with her work and listening to her gossip. Late that evening she went back to her cold, empty, cheerless house. For a long time she walked about aimlessly, unable to find peace and not knowing what to do with herself. She was worried because it was almost night and Yegor Ivanovich had not yet brought the promised literature.

Heavy grey flakes of autumn snow were falling. They clung softly to the windowpane until they melted and silently slid down, leaving wet trails behind them. She thought of her son. . . .

There was a cautious knock at the door. The mother quickly ran and removed the hook. Sasha stepped in. The mother had not seen her for a long time, and the first impression was that she was unnaturally plump.

"Good evening," she said, glad that someone had come and she would not be alone for at least part of the night. "I haven't seen you for a long time. Been away?"

"No. I was in jail," answered the girl with a smile. "With Nikolai Ivanovich. Remember him?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the mother. "Yegor Ivanovich told me yesterday they had let him out, but I didn't know about you. Nobody told me you were there too. . . ."

"It doesn't matter. Here, I have to change my clothes before Yegor Ivanovich comes," she said, glancing about.

"You're all wet."

"I brought the papers and leaflets. . . ."

"Let's have them, let's have them!" cried the mother eagerly.

The girl unfastened her coat and shook herself, and papers fluttered down as if they were leaves falling off a tree. The mother laughed as she picked them up.

"I wondered what made you so fat when I saw you—thought you'd got married and were expecting a baby. Dear me! How many you brought! You didn't walk here, did you?"

"Yes," said Sasha, who was tall and slender again. The mother noticed that her face was drawn, making her eyes look more enormous than ever, and that there were dark circles under her eyes.

"Why should you be doing this, instead of taking the rest you need after just getting out?" said the mother with a sigh and a shake of her head.

"It has to be done," said the shivering girl. "Tell me about Pavel Mikhailovich—was he very much upset when they arrested him?"

Sasha did not look at the mother as she asked, bending her head and adjusting her hair with trembling fingers.

"Not very," answered the mother. "He wouldn't be likely to give himself away."

"Is he strong?" asked the girl softly. .

"Never been sick in his life," answered the mother. "But you're shivering so! Here, I'll give you some tea with raspberry jam."

"That would be nice. Only it's so much trouble—so late. Let me do it myself."

"Tired as you are?" said the mother in a tone of reproof as she began to light the samovar. Sasha, too, went out into the kitchen and sat there on a bench, her hands behind her head.

"Jail wears one out after all," she said. "That accursed idleness! Nothing could be worse! Sitting there like a caged beast when you know there's so much to be done!"

"Who will ever reward you for all that?" asked the mother. Then, with a sigh, she supplied her own answer, "No one but the Lord! But I suppose you don't believe in Him either?"

"No," answered the girl shortly, with a shake of her head.

"How can that be?" said the mother impulsively, adding with deep conviction as she wiped the coal dust off her hands on her apron. "You don't understand your own faith. How could you live such a life if you didn't believe in God?"

Suddenly someone stamped on to the porch with a low mutter. The mother gave a start and the girl quickly jumped to her feet.

"Don't open the door," she whispered. "If it's the gendarmes, you don't know who I am. I mistook the house in the dark and fainted on the doorstep. You undressed me and found the leaflets, understand?"

"You poor darling! Why should I say that?" asked the mother, deeply touched.

"Wait a minute," said Sasha, listening at the door. "It may be Yegor."

It *was* Yegor, all wet and panting with exhaustion.

"Got the samovar going I see! Nothing like a samovar to cheer you up, mother! You here already, Sasha?"

He kept on talking without pause as he slowly pulled off his heavy coat, filling the kitchen with the sound of his raucous breathing.

"The authorities don't like this little lady, mother. When the jail-keeper dared to insult her, she announced a hunger strike until he apologized. For eight days she didn't eat a thing, and so she all but departed from this life. How do you like that? Ever see a belly like mine?"

He held on to his ludicrous pouch as he went into the other room, still talking even when he had closed the door behind him.

"Did you really not eat for eight days?" asked the mother in amazement.

"I had to do something to make him apologize," answered Sasha, still shivering with cold. The mother found a shade of reproach in the girl's severity and imperturbability.

"What a girl!" she thought, saying aloud, "What if you had died?"

"It couldn't have been helped," said the girl softly. "But he apologized. You can't let people take advantage of you."

"Hm-m-m!" said the mother slowly. "That's all men do—take advantage of us women all our lives."

"Well, I've got rid of my load," said Yegor, opening the door. "Samovar ready? Here, let me take it in."

He carried it into the next room, saying as he did so, "My own dear papa drank no less than twenty glasses of tea a day, thanks to which he lived in peace and good health to the ripe age of seventy-three, weighing all of eight poods and serving as deacon in the town of Voskresensk. . . ."

"Are you the son of Father Ivan?" exclaimed the mother.

"I am. Are you acquainted with my honourable sire?"

"I come from Voskresensk too!"

"From my native town? Whose daughter are you?"

"Your neighbour's! The Seregins'!"

"Daughter of lame Nil? Why, I know him very well! I don't know how many times he's tweaked my ear for me."

They stood facing each other, laughing and asking a thousand questions. Sasha smiled as she brewed the tea. The rattling of the glasses brought the mother back to her surroundings.

"Oh, excuse me! Everything went right out of my mind. It's such a nice thing to meet someone from your own town!"

"I am the one to apologize for having taken things into my own hands. But it's eleven o'clock already and I have a long walk ahead of me."

"Where are you going? To town?" asked the mother in surprise.

"Yes."

"But why should you? It's so dark and wet and you're so tired. Spend the night here. Yegor Ivanovich can sleep in the kitchen and you and me in here."

"No, I must go," said the girl simply.

"Unfortunately the young lady must go. They know her here. She mustn't be seen in the streets tomorrow."

"But how can she? All alone?"

"All alone," said Yegor with a short laugh.

The girl poured herself out a glass of tea, salted a piece of black bread and began to eat, glancing thoughtfully at the mother.

"How do you ever do it, you and Natasha? I could never make myself. I'd be afraid," said Pelagea.

"And she's afraid," observed Yegor. "You are, aren't you, Sasha?"

"Of course I am," replied the girl.

The mother glanced at her and at Yegor.

"How—how severe you people are!" she exclaimed.

When she had finished her tea, Sasha silently shook Yegor's hand and went into the kitchen. The mother followed her.

"If you see Pavel Mikhailovich, give him my regards," said Sasha. "Please don't forget."

With her hand on the knob of the door, she suddenly turned. "May I kiss you?" she said.

The mother silently embraced her and kissed her warmly.

"Thank you," said the girl, and with a nod of her head she went out.

When the mother returned to the room, she looked anxiously out of the window. Wet flakes of snow were falling in the darkness.

"Remember the Prozorovs?" asked Yegor.

He sat with his legs widespread, noisily blowing his tea. His face was red and moist and contented.

"Yes I do," said the mother musingly, sidling up to the table. She sat down and looked at Yegor sadly.

"Tck-tck! That Sasha! How will she ever reach town?"

"She'll be tired," agreed Yegor. "Jail hasn't done her any good. She used to be stronger. Besides, she was brought up for an easy life. Seems there's already a spot on her lungs."

"Who is she?" the mother asked softly.

"Daughter of a country gentleman. Her father's a pig, according to what she says. Did you know they wanted to get married, mother?"

"Who?"

"She and Pavel. But as you see, nothing comes of it. When he's out, she's in jail, and vice versa."

"I didn't know," said the mother after a pause. "Pavel never talks about himself."

Now she felt all the sorrier for the girl, and turned to her guest in an involuntary burst of displeasure.

"Why didn't you take her home?" she said.

"I couldn't," he replied simply. "I have a lot of things to do here in the settlement—from early in the morning I'll be going from one place to another, and that's not easy for a man as short of breath as I am."

"She's a fine girl," said the mother, her mind occupied with what Yegor had just told her. She was hurt to think she had learned this from a stranger rather than from her son, and so she frowned and bit her lips.

"She is," nodded Yegor. "I can see that you feel sorry for her. No sense in that. Your heart'll give out if you start feeling sorry for all us rebels. None of us has a very easy life if the truth be told. One of my comrades just came back from exile. When he got to Nizhni-Novgorod his wife and child were waiting for him in Smolensk, but when he got to Smolensk they were already in jail in Moscow. Now it's his wife's turn to go out to Siberia. I also had a wife—a wonderful woman. Five years of that kind of life put her in her grave."

He swallowed his tea in one gulp and continued his story. He told her the years and the months of his jail sentences and his exile. He told her of various misfortunes, of beatings in jail, of starvation in Siberia. The mother watched him and wondered at the calm simplicity with which he recounted the story of a life so full of suffering and persecution. . . .

"But let's get down to business."

His tone changed and his face became more serious. He began to ask her how she intended to get the literature into the factory, and the mother was amazed at his knowledge of details.

When they had exhausted this subject, they began to speak about their native town again. His tone was jocular, but she wandered meditatively through her past, and it seemed to her that it strangely resembled a swamp where small firs and white birches and trembling aspens grew. The birches grew slowly, and after five years in the putrid soil, fell and rotted away. She beheld this vision, and a great pity welled up in her breast. Again she saw before her the figure of a young girl, a girl with a sharp stubborn face. She was making her way through the wet snowflakes, weary and alone. . . . And the mother's son was in jail. Maybe he had not yet fallen asleep and lay there thinking . . . but not of her, his mother. Now there was someone dearer to him. Like tattered clouds came the painful thoughts, enveloping her soul in darkness. . . .

"You're tired, mother. Let's go to bed," said Yegor with a smile.

She said good night and slipped cautiously into the kitchen, her heart full of a caustic bitterness.

At breakfast the next morning Yegor said:

"If they catch you and ask where you got those heretical leaflets, what will you say?"

"I'll say it's none of their business," she answered.

"I'm afraid they won't agree with you," objected Yegor. "They're dead certain it is their business. They'll keep asking you long and persistently."

"But I won't tell them."

"They'll put you in jail."

"What of it? Thank the Lord that's something I'm fit for!" she said with a sigh. "Who needs me? Nobody. And I don't suppose they'll torture me. They say—"

"Hm!" said Yegor, looking at her intently. "No, they won't torture you. But good people should spare themselves."

"You're a fine one to say that!" answered the mother with a short laugh.

Yegor paced the room without answering. Then he went over to her and said, "It's hard, mother. I know how hard it is for you."

"It's hard for everybody," she replied with a wave of her hand. "Maybe it's easier for those who understand. But little by little I too am beginning to understand what good people are trying to do."

"If you understand that, everybody needs you, mother—everybody!" he said earnestly.

She glanced at him and smiled.

At noon she got ready to go to the factory, padding herself with the leaflets so cleverly that Yegor clicked his tongue with satisfaction as he examined her.

"'Sehr gut!' as all good Germans say after the first barrel of beer. Literature hasn't changed you in the least, mother—you're just the same kind, middle-aged woman, tall and inclined to plumpness. May the numerous gods bless your humble beginning!"

Half an hour later she stood at the gates of the factory, calm and confident, bending under the weight of her baskets. Two guards passed their hands roughly over everyone who entered the yard, and were rewarded by the curses of their victims and the jibes of the workers. To one side stood a policeman and a long-legged man with a red face and darting eyes. The mother shifted the wooden yoke supporting her baskets from one shoulder to the other and watched the long-legged man from under her brows, for she sensed that he was a spy.

"You devils ought to search our heads and not our pockets," said a tall, curly-haired workman to the guards who were feeling his clothes.

"Nothing but lice in your heads," answered one of the guards.

"So go after the lice and leave us alone," retorted the workman.

The spy shot him a swift glance and spat with disgust.

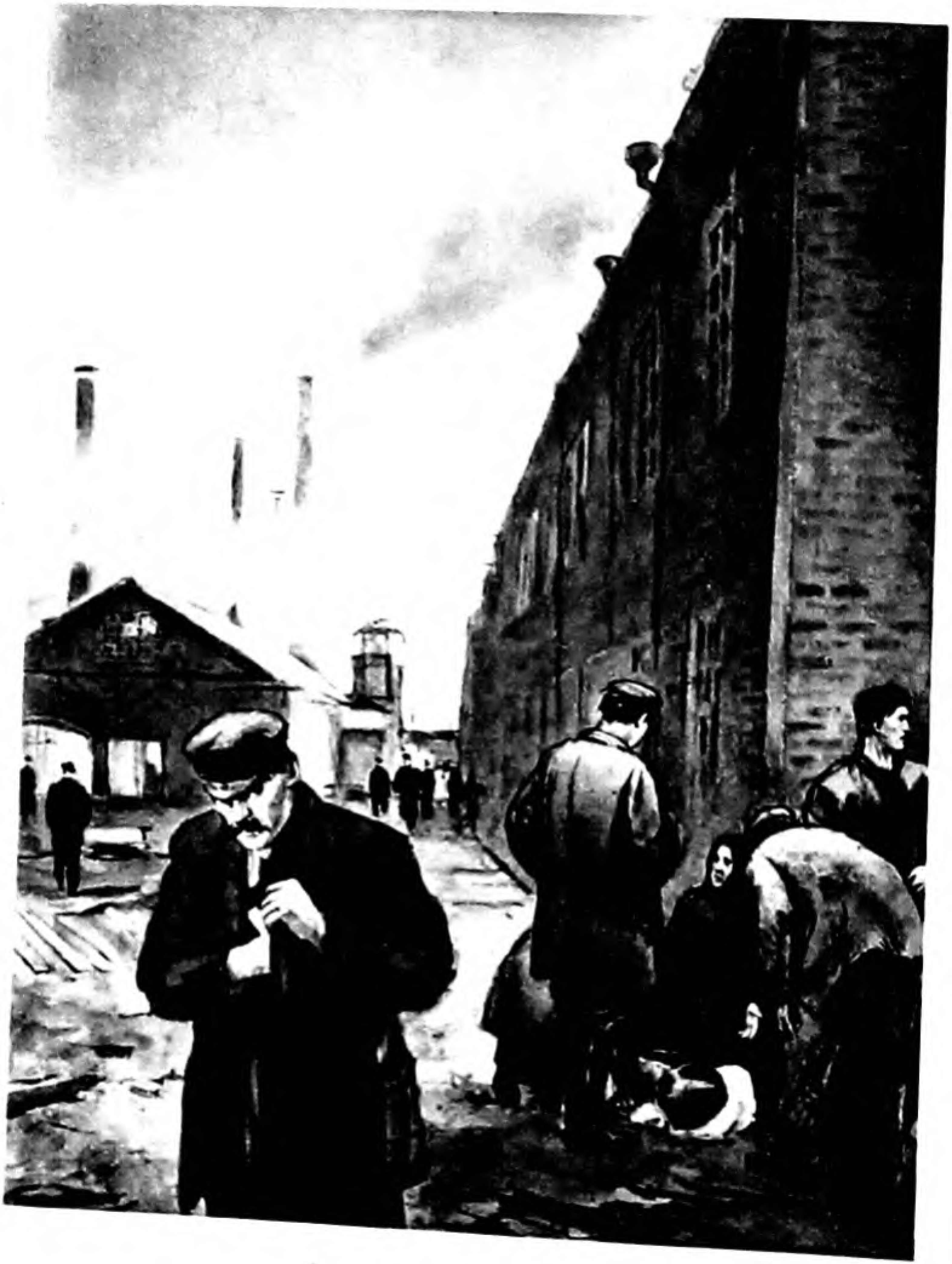
"You might let me through," said the mother. "Can't you see my back's about to break under this load?"

"Go on, go on!" cried the guard irritably. "Got to have your say too, haven't you?"

When the mother reached her place, she set her baskets on the ground, wiped the sweat off her face and looked round.

The two Gusev brothers, both of them mechanics, came over to her.

"Got any *pirogi*?" asked Vasili, the elder of the two, with a frown.



"Have some tomorrow," she replied.

This was the watchword. The faces of the brothers lit up.

"Oh you mother-o-mine!" burst out Ivan.

Vasili squatted down to peep into the basket, and at that moment a pack of leaflets found its way into the breast of his jacket.

"Let's not go home, Ivan," he said in a loud voice. "We'll buy dinner from her." As he spoke he thrust another pack into his boot top. "Have to help out the new peddler."

"Sure!" said Ivan with a laugh.

The mother glanced cautiously about.

"Soup! Hot noodles!" she cried.

Furtively removing the leaflets pack by pack, she handed them to the brothers. Every time a pack left her hands, the yellow face of the officer would flare up in her mind like a struck match, and she would say to herself gloatingly, "Here, take that, my fine fellow. And that! And that!"

The workers came with bowls in their hands; whenever one of them would draw near, Ivan Gusev would begin to laugh loudly and the mother would calmly stop giving him the leaflets and turn to her noodles.

"You're a slick one, Pelagea Nilovna!" laughed the brothers.

"It's need drives her to it," sullenly observed a stoker standing nearby. "They took her breadwinner away from her, the bastards! Here, let's have three kopeks' worth of noodles. Never mind, mother, you'll get along somehow!"

"Thanks for the kind words," she answered with a smile.

"It doesn't cost much to say a few kind words," he muttered, walking away.

"Hot soup! Noodles! Porridge!" cried Pelagea.

She kept thinking of how she would tell her son about her first experience with the leaflets, while in the back of her mind hovered the yellow face of the officer, puzzled and angry. His black moustache kept twitching in consternation and his clenched teeth flashed whitely from under his curled lip. Happiness sang in her heart like a bird. She moved her eyebrows archly and mentally kept saying to the officer, as she carried on her business, "Here, take that!"

XVI

That evening while she was having tea she heard hoofs squashing through the mud outside, and then a familiar voice. She jumped up and rushed through the kitchen to the door. A quick step sounded on the porch. Everything went black before her eyes; she pushed open the door with her foot and leaned against the jamb for support.

"Evening, *nenko*!" came the familiar voice, and long thin arms were thrown about her shoulders.

She felt a stab of disappointment, then of joy, on seeing Andrei. The two sensations merged into one great, consuming emotion, which caught her up in a warm wave, lifting her until she fell with her face against Andrei's shoulder. He held her tight in trembling arms; the mother cried softly and he stroked her hair, saying in a voice that was music to her ears, "Don't cry, *nenko*, don't burden your heart. They're sure to let him out soon. They can't get a thing on him; all the fellows are keeping mum as boiled fish. . . ."

With his arm about the mother's shoulders, he led her into the other room. She pressed close, greedily drinking in his every word as she wiped the tears from her eyes with movements as quick as a squirrel's.

"Greetings from Pavel. He's as well and happy as can be expected. It's crowded in there. They arrested over a hundred fellows from the town as well as our settlement, and locked them up three and four to a cell. The heads of the jail are good chaps, and they're worn out from all the work those devilish gendarmes have given them. The heads aren't very strict. They keep saying, 'Just keep quiet, gentlemen, so's not to get us in trouble.' And everything goes along nicely. The fellows talk together, lend each other books and share their food. It's a fine jail—old and dirty, but easy on a fellow. The criminal prisoners are a good lot too and give us plenty of help. Bukin and me and four others have been let out. Pavel's turn will come soon. Vesovshchikov'll be the last; he has them all down on him for cussing them the way he does. The gendarmes can't bear the sight of him. They'll put him on trial or give him a beating one of these days. Pavel's always telling him to stop it. Says his swearing won't improve them in the least. But he just shouts, 'I'll scrape them off the earth like a scab off a sore!' Pavel behaves well—keeps himself firm and steady. I'm certain they'll let him out soon."

"Soon," repeated the mother with a tender smile, comforted. "I'm sure it'll be soon."

"Then everything's all right. And now give me a glass of tea and tell me how you've been getting on."

He saw her smiling all over, so soft and kind, with a glimmer of love lighting eyes shadowed by sadness.

"I'm so fond of you, Andryusha," she sighed, studying his thin face, comically overgrown with dark bushes of beard.

"Just a little bit would be enough to make me happy," he said, rocking back and forth on his chair. "I know you're fond of me. Your heart's big enough to love everybody."

"But I love you especially," she insisted. "If you had a mother, everybody would envy her for having such a son."

The *khokhol* shook his head and rubbed it briskly with both hands.

"I *have* a mother somewhere or other." His voice was low.

"Guess what I did today!" she exclaimed, and launched on an excited description of how she had taken the leaflets into the factory, slightly enhancing the tale in her enthusiasm.

At first he opened his eyes wide in amazement, then burst into laughter.

"Oho!" he cried happily. "That's not to be sneezed at! That's real help! Won't Pavel be happy? That's marvellous, *nenko*—for Pavel and everybody else!"

His whole body rocked back and forth. He cracked his fingers and whistled in transport, radiating joy and calling forth a strong and full response from the mother.

"You blessed Andryusha!" she said, the floodgates of her heart opening up to let out the stream of words that rushed forth, splashing and sparkling in quiet joy. "When I think of my own life—oh merciful Jesus! What did I ever live for? Drudgery, beatings; never saw anyone but my husband, never knew anything but fear! I never even noticed how Pavel grew up, and I don't know whether I loved him or not while my husband was alive. All my thoughts and all my worries were about one thing—to stuff that brute of mine with food, to do his pleasure without keeping him waiting, so's he shouldn't get angry and beat me—so's he'd take pity on me just for once! But I don't remember that he ever did. He used to beat me as if it wasn't his wife he was beating, but everybody he had a grudge against. For twenty years I lived like that. I've forgotten what it was like before I got married. When I try to think back, everything's a blank. Yegor Ivanovich was here—we're both from the same town. He spoke about many things, but I? I remember our house, and I remember the people, but I don't remember how they lived or what they said or what became of them. I remember a fire. Two fires. It's as if everything was flogged out of me and my soul was sealed up tight, deaf and blind."

She gasped for breath like a fish snatched out of the water.

"My husband died," she went on, leaning forward and lowering her voice, "and I turned to my son, but he was taken up with this business. That was hard to bear; I was dreadfully afraid for him. How could I go on living if anything happened to him? What tortures I went through! My heart fairly burst when I thought of what might happen to him."

She paused for a moment, then with a shake of her head she said with great significance, "It's not a pure love, our woman's love. We love what we need for our own sakes. But when I look at you, grieving so for your mother—what's she to you? And all these other people suffering so for the sake of others . . . going to jail and to Siberia . . . dying . . . young girls walking so far alone at night, through the mud, through the rain and the snow—seven versts from the town to our house! What makes them? Why do they do it? Because they have a great, pure love. And they have faith—a deep faith, Andryusha. But as for me—I can't love like that! I only love what's my own, what's close to me."

"No you don't," said the *khokhol*, turning away and rubbing his head and cheeks and eyes briskly, as was his habit. "Everyone loves what's close to him, but far-away things are close if one's heart is big enough. You can do great things because you have a great mother love in you."

"God grant it," she breathed. "I feel this is a good way to live. I love you now, Andrei, maybe even more than Pasha. He keeps so to himself—just look, he wants to marry Sasha, but he's never said a word of it to me, his mother."

"That's not true," objected the *khokhol*. "I know for sure it's not true.He loves her and she him—that's true. But they'll never get married. She'd like to, but he doesn't want to."

"I see," said the mother thoughtfully, her sad eyes on the *khokhol's* face. "So that's how it is—people refusing their own happiness. . . ."

"Pavel's a rare man." The *khokhol's* voice was soft. "He has an iron will."

"And now he's sitting in jail," said the mother thoughtfully. "That's frightening—but not so very. Life is different, and my fears are different. Now I'm afraid for everybody. And my heart's different because my soul has opened up the eyes of my heart, and it looks out and feels sad, but glad. There are lots of things I don't understand, and it's a bitter thing to me that you don't believe in the Lord God. But what can I do about it? I see that all of you are truly good. You've set yourselves a hard life for the sake of the people, a difficult life for the sake of the truth. And now I understand your truth: as long as there are rich people, the common people will never be able to get anything—no joy, no justice—nothing! Now that I'm living among you, sometimes at night I think back over the past, think of my young strength crushed under a boot, my young heart pounded under a fist, and I feel sorry for myself and feel bitter. But it's easier for me to live now. Little by little I can see myself as I am."

The *khokhol* got up—tall, thin, thoughtful—and began pacing the floor, trying to make no noise.

"How well you've put it," he said softly. "How very well! In Kerch there lived a young Jew who wrote poetry, and one day he wrote this:

And the innocent ones who are murdered,
Truth will resurrect.

"He himself was killed by the police there in Kerch, but that isn't important. He understood the truth and sowed its seeds among the people. You too are one of those 'innocent ones'. . . ."

"But now I speak up," continued the mother. "I speak up and listen to my own words and scarcely believe my own ears. All my life I only thought of one thing—how to get rid of each new day, how to live it unnoticed, so that nobody would touch me. But now I'm filled with thoughts of other people. Maybe I don't quite understand your cause, but all of you are dear to me, I feel for all of you and want all of you to be happy. Especially you, Andryusha."

He came up to her.

"Thank you," he said. He took her hand in his and pressed it tightly, then quickly turned away. Worn out by her emotion, the mother slowly and silently washed the glasses, brooding over the quiet joy in her heart.

"You might show Vesovshchikov some affection, *nenko,*" said the *khokhol* as he walked back and forth. "His father's in jail, the worthless old drunk! Whenever Nikolai catches a glimpse of him at the window, he begins cursing. That's a bad thing to do. Nikolai's kind by nature, he loves dogs and mice and all sorts of animals, but he hates people. Just see what can happen to a man!"

"His mother gone . . . his father a thief and a drunkard . . ." said the mother musingly.

When Andrei left to go to bed, she secretly made the sign of the cross over him, and when he had been in bed for half an hour, she asked softly:

"Are you asleep, Andryusha?"

"No, why?"

"Good night."

"Thank you, *nenko*. Thank you," he said gratefully.

XVII

The next day, when Pelagea came to the gates of the factory, the guards stopped her, ordered her to put down her baskets and made a thorough search.

"Everything'll get cold!" she protested while they roughly felt her clothes.

"Shut up!" snapped the guard.

"They throw them over the fence, I tell you," said another guard, giving her a light push on the shoulder.

Once inside the factory yard, the first one to come up to her was the old man Sizov.

"Have you heard, mother?" he asked quietly, with a glance round.

"What?"

"Those papers. They've put in their appearance again. They're sprinkled everywhere, like salt on your bread. There's your searches and arrests for you! They threw my nephew Mazin in jail, but what for? They took your son too, but now everybody can see it wasn't them."

He clutched his beard and looked at her quizzically.

"Why don't you come see me? You must be lonely all by yourself."

She thanked him and began calling out her wares, taking note of the unusual bustle at the factory. Everybody was excited. The men gathered in groups, then broke up, running from one shop to another. She sensed something brave and courageous in the sooty air. Now and again could be heard sarcastic remarks and exclamations of encouragement. The older workers smiled furtively. The bosses walked past with worried looks on their faces. Policemen ran about, and when groups of workers caught sight of them they either sauntered away or stopped talking, fixing their eyes on the angry, exasperated faces.

The faces of the workers had a washed look. She caught a glimpse of the tall elder Gusev, with his laughing brother following at his heels.

Vavilov, foreman of the carpenter shop, and Isai, the timekeeper, walked slowly past. The puny little timekeeper had his head screwed up and round to get a view of the foreman's formidable face as he chattered away with jerks of his stringy beard.

"They make a joke of it, Ivan Ivanovich. They seem to take pleasure in it, though it means the ruination of the state, as the honourable director pointed out. It's not weeding, but ploughing under that has to be done here. . . ."

Vavilov walked on with his hands behind his back, his fingers tightly clenched.

"Go ahead and print whatever you like, you son of a bitch!" he said in a loud voice. "But don't dare say a word about me!"

Vasili Gusev came up to the mother.

"I think I'll try another one of your dinners, mother. Your food's good," he said, lowering his voice and narrowing his eyes to add, "Just what we need. Good work, mother."

She nodded to him affectionately. She was pleased to have this fellow, who was considered the biggest mischief-maker in the settlement, address her with such respect. She was also pleased by the excitement at the factory, and kept thinking, "If it wasn't for me. . . ."

Three unskilled labourers stopped not far away from her.

"Couldn't find it anywhere," said one of them softly, in a tone of regret.

"I'd like to hear what's in it. I don't know how to read myself, but it's clear the shot went home," observed another.

"Let's go into the boiler room," said the third, glancing round.

Gusev looked at the mother and winked.

"See what's happening?" he said.

Pelagea came home in high spirits.

"The people are sorry they don't know how to read," she said to Andrei. "When I was young I knew how to read, but I've forgotten."

"Why not learn?" suggested the *khokhol*.

"At my age? Just to make a laughingstock of myself?"

But Andrei took a book off the shelf and pointed to one of the letters on the cover.

"What's that?" he asked.

"'R,'" she answered with a smile.

"And that?"

"'A.'"

She was self-conscious and ashamed. It seemed to her that Andrei's eyes were secretly laughing at her, and she avoided their glance. But his voice was soft and gentle and his face grave.

"Are you really thinking of teaching me, Andryusha?" she asked with a short involuntary laugh.

"Why not?" he replied. "If you used to know how, it'll come back easy. No harm in trying, as they say."

"But there's another saying: 'You can't become a saint by staring at the icon.'"

"Hm!" said the *khokhol* with a shake of his head. "There are lots of sayings. 'The less you know the sounder you sleep,' for instance. But it's only the belly that thinks like that, harnessing the soul with such sayings to drive it along the easier. What letter is this?"

"'L,'" said the mother.

"Good. And this one?"

She strained her eyes and knitted her brows in the effort to recall the forgotten letters, forgetting everything else. But soon her eyes tired. At first she shed tears of exhaustion, then of despair.

"Learning to read!" she whimpered. "Forty years old and just learning my ABC's!"

"Don't cry," said the *khokhol* soothingly. "You couldn't choose your life, but at least you realize what a vile one it's been. Thousands of people could live better if they wanted to, but they go on living like brutes and even think it's wonderful. Today a man works and eats, and tomorrow he works and eats, and goes on all the days of his life—just working and eating. What's so wonderful about that? Between times he brings children into the world who amuse him until they begin demanding too much to eat; then he gets angry and curses them: 'Hurry and grow up, you little brats! Time to start working!' He'd like to turn his children into domestic animals, but they begin working for the sake of their own bellies—stretching out their lives like a piece of gum. The only people worthy of the name are those who devote themselves to freeing the mind of man. You too, as far as you're able, are doing this now."

"Me?" she breathed deprecatingly. "What can I do?"

"Don't say that. We're like the rain, every drop of which waters the seeds. And when you start reading—"

He broke off with a laugh, got up and began pacing the floor.

"You've simply got to learn. Soon Pavel will come home, and then—oho!"

"Ah, Andryusha!" said the mother. "Everything's simple when you're young. But when you grow older—so many cares, so little strength, and no brains at all!"

XVIII

That evening when the *khokhol* had gone out, the mother lighted the lamp and began to knit a stocking. But soon she got up, walked irresolutely about the room, went into the kitchen, locked the door, and came back with her eyebrows twitching. Having drawn the curtains over the windows, she took a book off a shelf and sat down at the table again. In spite of her precautions, she could not help glancing furtively about before she bent over the book and began moving her lips. At every sound coming from outside she started, covered the book with her hand and strained her ears. Then she began to whisper to herself again, opening and closing her eyes.

"'L' for letter; 'b' for box. . . ."

Someone knocked at the door and the mother jumped up, thrusting the book back on the shelf.

"Who's there?" she asked in alarm.

"Me."

Rybin came in stroking his beard.

"Never used to ask 'who's there,'" he said. "Alone? Thought the *khokhol* would be in. I saw him today. Jail doesn't seem to have done him any harm."

He sat down and turned to the mother.

"Let's have a talk."

He gave her a significant, secretive glance that filled her with vague alarms.

"Everything costs money," he began in his heavy voice. "Costs money to get born, costs money to die. Books and leaflets cost money too. Do you know where the money for these books comes from?"

"No, I don't," said the mother softly, sensing that something was wrong.

"Neither do I. And the next question is, who writes them?"

"People with book learning. . . ."

"The gentlefolk," said Rybin, a dark flush sweeping over his bearded face. "In other words, the gentlefolk write the books and pass them out. But the books are written against the gentlefolk. Now you just try and explain to me what sense there is in them spending their money to stir up the common folk against themselves, eh?"

The mother gave a frightened gasp and blinked her eyes.

"What do you think?"

"Aha!" said Rybin, turning like a bear. "There you are. Me too—as soon as that thought struck me, everything went cold."

"Have you found out something?"

"Tricked!" answered Rybin. "I feel we've been tricked. I have no facts, but there's treachery here. That's what! Your gentlefolk are sly. I'm after the truth. And now I understand the truth, and I'm not going along with the gentlefolk any more. Whenever it suits them, they'll knock me down and walk over me as if I was a bridge. . . ."

His words were a vice gripping the mother's heart.

"Dear Jesus!" she cried in sorrow. "Can it be that Pasha doesn't understand? And all those who. . . ."

Before her passed the grave honest faces of Yegor, Nikolai Ivanovich and Sasha. Her pulse quickened.

"No, no!" she said, shaking her head. "I can't believe it! They're people with a conscience."

"Who do you mean?" asked Rybin thoughtfully.

"All of them. Every last one of them. I've seen that."

"You aren't looking in the right place, mother. Look further away," said Rybin, dropping his head. "Those that've joined up with us—they may not know anything themselves. They have faith, and that's a good thing. But behind them may stand others—people who are only interested in their own good. A person doesn't turn against himself for nothing." Then he added, with a peasant's laboured conviction, "Nothing good'll ever come of the gentlefolk."

"What are you thinking of doing?" asked the mother, once more seized by doubt.

"Me?" Rybin glanced up at her, paused, then said, "We must keep clear of the gentlefolk, that's what."

Again he was gloomy and silent.

"I wanted to join up with the comrades and go along with them. I'm fit for that sort of thing. I know what to say to people. But now I'm going away. I've lost faith and so I have to go."

He dropped his head and became lost in thought.

"I'll go off all by myself through the villages and countryside, stirring up the people. They've got to take things in their own hands. Once they understand, they'll find a way. It'll be my job to help them understand. Their only hope is in themselves; their only brains are their own."

She began to pity this man and to be afraid for him. He who had seemed unpleasant to her, now for some reason became very dear.

"They'll catch you," she said softly.

Rybin looked at her.

"They will, but then they'll let me go, and I'll start all over again."

"The muzhiks themselves will tie you up. They'll throw you in jail."

"I'll serve my term and come out. And begin again. As for the muzhiks, they'll tie me up once, twice, and again, and then they'll begin to realize it'd be better to listen to what I have to say than to tie me up. I'll say: 'Don't believe me—just listen.' And if they listen, they'll believe me."

He spoke slowly, feeling for each word.

"I've swallowed a lot lately. And learned a thing or two."

"This'll be the end of you, Mikhailo Ivanovich," she said, shaking her head sadly.

He gazed at her quizzically, expectantly, with his dark, deep-set eyes. His strong body leaned forward, his hands grasped the seat of his chair, and his swarthy face was pale in the dark frame of his beard.

"Remember what Christ said about the seed? It has to die to be born again. But death won't catch me very soon. I'm a sly old fox."

He stirred in his chair and rose unhurriedly.

"I'll go down to the tavern and sit with the men awhile. The *khokhol* doesn't seem to be coming. Back at the old business?"

"Yes," answered the mother with a smile.

"Good. Tell him about me."

They walked slowly into the kitchen, side by side, passing remarks without looking at each other.

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye. When will you give notice at the factory?"

"I've given it already."

"And when are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow. Early in the morning. Good-bye."

Clumsily and reluctantly Rybin stooped through the door on to the porch. For a minute the mother stood listening to his heavy steps and to the doubts stirring in her own breast. Then she turned quietly, went into the other room and lifted the curtain of the window. It was dark outside.

"I live by night," she thought.

She felt sorry for that dignified muzhik, so broad and strong.

Andrei came home in high spirits.

She told him about Rybin.

"Let him wander through the villages shouting of justice and stirring up the people," he said. "It's hard for him to go along with us. His head's full of muzhik ideas. No room there for ours."

"He talked about the gentlefolk. There's something in what he said," observed the mother cautiously. "See they don't fool you!"

"Do they rub you the wrong way?" laughed the *khokhol*. "Eh, *nenko*—money! If only we had it! We're still carrying on at other people's expense. Nikolai Ivanovich, for instance, gets seventy-five rubles a month; he gives us fifty. The same with the others. Sometimes half-starved university students send us a donation collected kopek by kopek. Of course there are all kinds of gentlefolk. Some leave you, some deceive you, but the very best of them join their lot with yours."

He clapped his hands together and went on with conviction.

"Our final triumph's still far, far away, but even so we'll hold a minor celebration on May Day. It's going to be splendid."

His enthusiasm dispelled the doubts sown by Rybin. The *khokhol* walked up and down, rumpling his hair and gazing at the floor.

"Sometimes your heart's so full you can hardly bear it. It seems no matter where you go, everyone's your comrade. The same fire's burning in each of their breasts, they're all good and kind and jolly. You don't have to talk to understand each other. Together you form one great chorus in which every heart sings its own song. And all the songs are like streams pouring into one river, and the river flows broad and free into the joyous sea of the new life."

The mother did not stir for fear of disturbing his thoughts and interrupting his speech. She always listened more attentively to him than to anyone else; he spoke more simply than the others and his words went straight to the heart. Pavel never talked about what he saw ahead. But part of the *khokhol* always seemed to be living ahead; when he spoke he would hint at the great holiday coming for all the peoples of the earth. And for the mother it was this vision that gave meaning to life, and to the work of her son and all his comrades.

"Then suddenly you come to your senses," went on the *khokhol* with a shake of his head, "you glance round and everything is cold and dirty; everybody's cross and tired. . . ."

There was sadness in his voice. "You mustn't put your faith in people. That hurts, I know, but you must be afraid of them and even—even hate them. A man has two sides to him. You'd like to love the whole of him, but how can you? How can you forgive a person for rushing at you like a wild beast, for failing to see the living soul in you and smashing the human face of you? You can't forgive that! Not because of yourself. You could stand anything yourself. But because you can't let them think you approve; you can't lend them your back to practise beating other people on." His eyes were burning with a cold flame, his head was lowered stubbornly and he spoke more firmly. "I have no right to forgive anything wrong, even if it doesn't hurt me. I'm not the only one on this earth. Today I may let someone do me an injury, even laughing at it because it's not worth noticing, but tomorrow, having tried out his strength on me, he may browbeat somebody else. You can't look at everybody the same; you have to coldly pick and choose: this is my kind, this is not. Not very comforting, is it? But it's true."

For some reason the mother thought of Sasha, and then of the officer.

"What kind of bread can you expect from unsieved flour?" she said with a sigh.

"That's the whole trouble," exclaimed the *khokhol*.

"Yes," said the mother. In her memory rose the figure of her husband, as heavy and cheerless as a boulder overgrown with moss. She imagined how it would be if the *khokhol* married Natasha, and her son—Sasha.

"And why is it so?" asked the *khokhol*, warming up to his subject. "It's as plain as the nose on your face. It's all because people don't stand on the same level. Let's even them up! Let's divide up all that the mind has conceived and the hand has made. Let's not make people slaves of fear and envy, prisoners of greed and stupidity. . . ."

They had many such talks after this.

The *khokhol* was taken back at the factory, and he gave the mother all his wages. She accepted them from him as simply as she had from Pavel.

Sometimes Andrei would say to her, with a twinkle in his eye, "How about reading a bit, *nenko*?"

She would laugh, but firmly refuse. That twinkle in his eye hurt her.

"If you consider it such a joke, why bother?" she would think to herself.

But more and more often she would ask him to explain to her the meaning of some word, glancing aside as she asked and assuming a tone of indifference. He guessed that she was secretly studying, and in appreciation of her reticence he stopped asking her to read to him.

"My eyes are growing weak, Andryusha. I need glasses," she said to him one day.

"That's easily remedied," he replied. "On Sunday I'll take you to a doctor in town and we'll get you glasses."

XIX

Three times she went to ask if she might be allowed to see Pavel, and each time she was gently refused by the general of the gendarmes, a grey-haired old man with purple cheeks and a big nose.

"You'll have to wait at least another week, mother. In a week's time, we'll see. But now it's impossible."

He was round and fat and reminded her of a ripe plum which has lain around long enough to be covered with a furry mould. He was forever digging at his sharp little white teeth with a yellow pick; his small green eyes smiled kindly, and his voice was always courteous and friendly.

"He's very polite," she told the *khokhol*. "Always smiling."

"I don't doubt it," answered the *khokhol*. "They're all very nice—so gentle and smiling. They're told: 'Here's a clever, honest fellow who's a bit dangerous. Just hang him, if you don't mind.' And they smile and hang him. And after that they go right on smiling."

"It was different with the one who came to search our house," said the mother. "You could see right away what a rat he was."

"None of them are human beings—they're just hammers to stun people with; tools to chisel down folks like us so they can handle us easily. They themselves have already been put into convenient shape for their bosses. They'll do anything they're ordered without thinking and without asking why."

At last they allowed her to see him, and one Sunday she found herself sitting humbly in a corner of the prison office. There were several other people in that small, dirty, low-ceilinged room waiting to be allowed to see prisoners. Apparently this was not the first time they had come there, for they knew each other, and they spun out a quiet sticky sort of conversation, like a spider's web.

"Have you heard?" said a plump woman with a flabby face, holding a travelling bag in her lap. "At early mass today the cathedral sexton ripped the ear off one of the choir boys."

"The choir boys are all hoodlums," observed an elderly gentleman in the uniform of a retired officer.

A bald little man with short legs, long arms and a protruding chin kept walking nervously about the office making comments in a cracked excited voice:

"Prices keep going up, and that makes people nasty. Second-rate beef costs fourteen kopeks a pound and bread's up to two and a half again. . . ."

Sometimes prisoners came in, all of them the same in their grey uniforms and heavy leather shoes. They would blink as they entered the dimly-lighted room. One of them had chains on his legs.

The atmosphere in the jail was strangely peaceful and everything took place much too simply. It seemed as if all these people had long since become accustomed and reconciled to their fate. Some of them patiently served their terms; others stood lazily on guard; still others came with weary regularity to visit the prisoners. The heart of the mother quivered with impatience. She looked wonderingly at everything about her, amazed by the sad simplicity of it all.

Next to her sat a little old woman with a wizened face and young eyes. She twisted her skinny neck to listen to all the talk, and looked at everyone with a pert twinkle in her eyes.

"Who do you come to see?" Pelagea asked her softly.

"My son. A university student," answered the old woman loudly. "And you?"

"Also my son. A worker."

"What's his name?"

"Vlassov."

"Haven't heard of him. Been in long?"

"Almost seven weeks."

"Oh, mine's been in almost ten months!" said the old woman, a note of pride in her voice.

"Yes, yes," prattled on the bald old man. "No patience left—everyone's angry, everyone shouts, and prices keep going up. And people keep getting cheaper accordingly. And no one raises his voice to put a stop to it."

"You're quite right," said the officer. "It's the limit. High time somebody with a strong voice ordered them to be quiet. That's what we need. A strong voice. . . ."

Everyone joined in the conversation, which became very animated. Each was anxious to give his opinion of life, but they all spoke in lowered tones and the mother disagreed with what they said. At home the talk was different, more clear and simple, and louder, too.

A fat jailor with a square red beard called out her name, looked her over from head to foot, and limped out, saying, "Follow me."

As she went, she felt an urge to give him a push to make him hurry.

Pavel was standing in a little room, smiling and holding out his hand. His mother grasped it with a little laugh and blinked rapidly.

"Hullo . . . hullo . . ." she said, at a loss for words.

"Calm yourself, mother," answered Pavel as he gripped her hand.

"I'm all right."

"After all, she's your mother," said the jailor with a sigh. "But you better stand further apart, so there's a distance between you," he added with a loud yawn.

Pavel asked about her health and about things at home. She had expected other questions and searched her son's eyes for them, but in vain. He was as serene as ever, though a bit paler, and his eyes seemed to have grown larger.

"Sasha asked to be remembered," she said.

Pavel's eyelids quivered, his face softened and he smiled. His mother felt a sharp pang in her heart.

"Do you think they'll let you out soon?" she asked, hurt and annoyed. "Whatever did they lock you up for? Those leaflets have put in their appearance again at the factory."

Pavel's eyes shone.

"Really?" he asked quickly.

"It's forbidden to talk about such things," said the jailor in a sleepy voice. "You can only talk about family affairs."

"Isn't that a family affair?" protested the mother.

"I can't answer that. But it's forbidden," replied the guard indifferently.

"All right, tell me about things at home," said Pavel. "What have you been doing?"

"Oh, I've been taking all those things to the factory," she said with a mischievous gleam in her eye. She paused, then went on with a smile, "You know, cabbage soup and porridge, the victuals Maria cooks, and—and—all those things."

Pavel understood. He ran his hand through his hair and grimaced with suppressed laughter.

"It's a fine thing you have something to keep you busy. No time to be lonely," he said tenderly, in a voice she had never heard before.

"When those leaflets appeared they searched me too," she announced, boasting a little.

"There you go again!" said the jailor in an offended tone. "I told you it was forbidden! They lock a man up so he won't know what's going on, and look at you! High time you understood what's forbidden!"

"Enough, mother," said Pavel. "Matvei Ivanovich has a good heart and there's no sense in making him angry. We're friends. It's quite by chance that he's the one to be present during your visit today. Usually it's the assistant head."

"Time's up," said the jailor, glancing at his watch.

"Thanks, mother dear," said Pavel. "Don't worry. They'll let me out soon."

He embraced her warmly and kissed her, and she was so moved and happy that she cried.

"Come away," said the jailor, muttering as he led her down the corridor, "Don't cry, they'll let him out. They'll let them all out. It's too crowded in here."

When she reached home she told the *khokhol* all about it, smiling brightly, with quivering brows.

"It was smart the way I let him know. He understood. He must have," she added with a sigh, "or he wouldn't have been so tender. He's never that way."

"You're a funny one!" laughed the *khokhol*. "People want all sorts of things, but all a mother wants is love."

"But those people, Andryusha, you should have seen them!" she cried with sudden animation. "The way they get used to it! Their children snatched away from them and thrown in jail, and they acting as if nothing had ever happened! Coming there and sitting and waiting and talking over the news. If educated people get used to it like that, what can you expect of us ignorant folk?"

"Oh, of course," replied the *khokhol* with characteristic irony. "After all, the law's easier on them than it is on us, and they have more use for the law than we have. So if they themselves get socked over the head with it once in a while they make a face, but not much of a one. It's easier to take a beating from your own club than from somebody else's."

XX

One evening when the mother was sitting at the table knitting a sock and the *khokhol* was reading to her about the revolt of the slaves in ancient Rome, somebody gave a loud knock at the door, and when the *khokhol* opened it, Vesovshchikov came in with a bundle under his arm. His cap was pushed to the back of his head and his legs were spattered with mud to the knee.

"I saw a light in here as I was passing by, so I came in to say hullo. Straight from jail," he announced in a strange voice. Taking Pelagea's hand, he shook it heartily. "Best regards from Pavel," he said.

He sat down uneasily and swept the room with a gloomy, suspicious glance.

The mother did not like him. She found something frightening about his square shaved head and his little eyes. But tonight she was glad to see him and smiled affectionately as she talked to him.

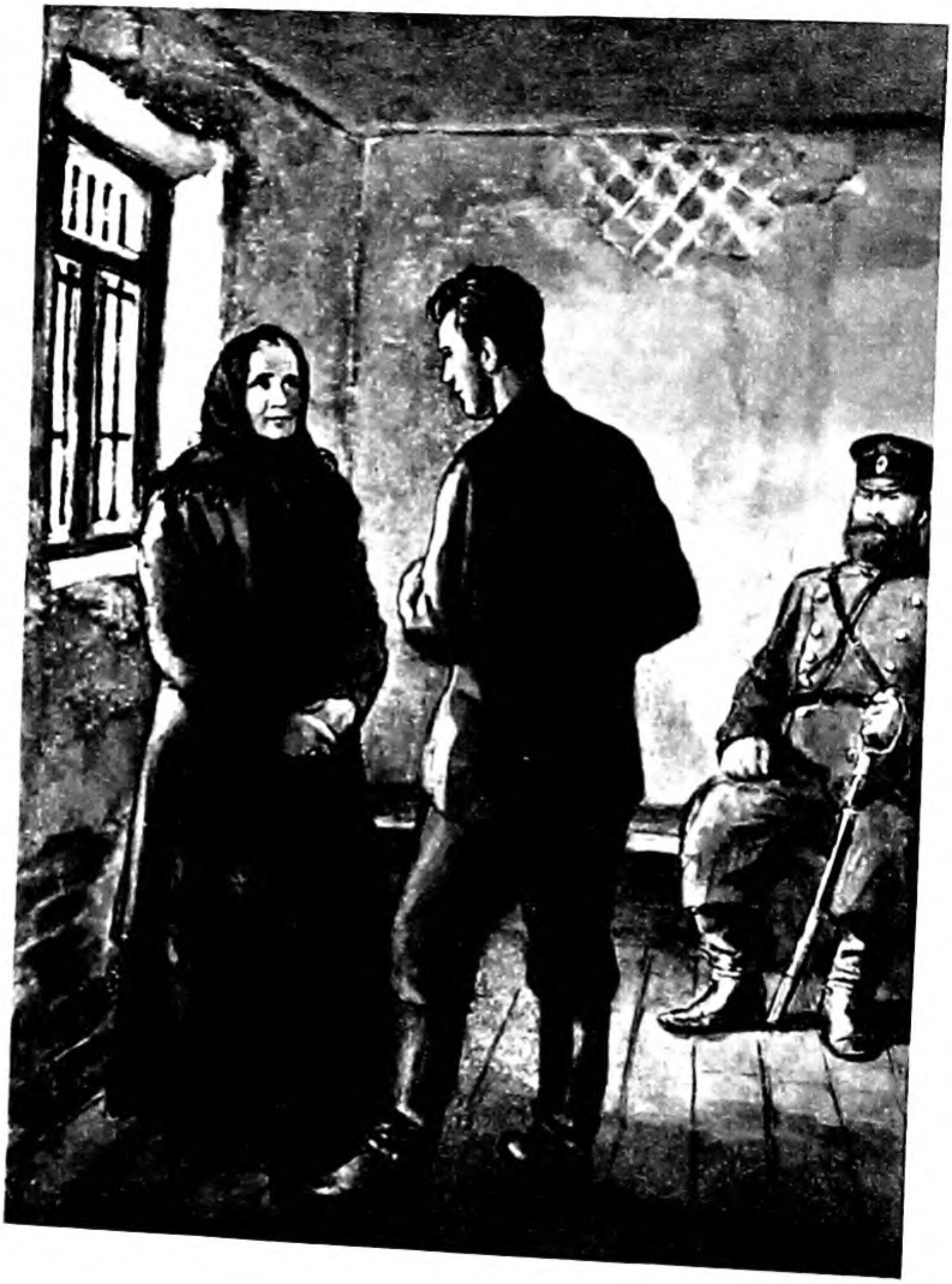
"How thin you are! Andryusha, let's give him a glass of tea."

"I'm already lighting the samovar," called the *khokhol* from the kitchen.

"Well, how's Pavel feeling? Have they let out anybody but you?"

Nikolai dropped his head.

"Pavel's waiting there patient. I'm the only one they let out." He raised his eyes to the mother's face and said slowly,



between clenched teeth, "I said to them, 'I've had enough. Let me go! If you don't I'll kill somebody and myself as well!' So they let me out."

"Ah!" said the mother, recoiling. Involuntarily she blinked when her glance met his sharp, narrowed eyes.

"How is Feodor Mazin?" cried the *khokhol* from the kitchen. "Still writing poetry?"

"Yes. That's beyond me," said Nikolai with a shake of his head. "What's he think he is, a canary? Put him in a cage, and he begins to sing. But there's one thing I do understand: I don't want to go home."

"What's there for you to go home to?" mused the mother. "An empty house, no fire in the stove, everything cold. . . ."

He said nothing, just kept on squinting at her. At last he took a package of cigarettes out of his pocket, lit up, and gave a mirthless grunt like the growl of a sullen dog.

"Yes, I suppose everything's cold," he said, watching the grey smoke fade away. "Frozen cockroaches on the floor. And frozen mice too. Would you let me spend the night here, Pelagea Nilovna?" he asked hoarsely without looking at her.

"Why, of course," she hastened to reply. Somehow she felt uneasy in his presence.

"These days fellows get ashamed of their own parents."

"What?" said the mother with a start.

He glanced at her, then closed his eyes, so that his pockmarked face had the appearance of being blind.

"I say fellows have come to be ashamed of their parents," he repeated with a sigh. "Pavel's never ashamed of you. But I'm ashamed of my old man. I'll never set my foot in his house again. I have no father. And no home. If I wasn't in the custody of the police I'd go off to Siberia. I'd free the people in exile there—help them run away. . . ."

Her sensitive heart told her that he was suffering, but she did not feel sorry for him.

"If that's the way you feel, you'd better go away," she said so as not to offend him by saying nothing.

Andrei came out of the kitchen.

"What's that you're saying?" he laughed.

"I'll go get us something to eat," said the mother, rising.

Nikolai looked intently at the *khokhol* for some time, then said unexpectedly, "I think some people ought to be killed."

"Oho! Why?" asked the *khokhol*.

"To get rid of them."

The *khokhol*, tall and lean, stood rocking on his heels in the centre of the room, looking down at Nikolai while the latter sat stolidly on his chair, wreathed in cigarette smoke. Red blotches broke out on his face.

"I'll rip the head off that Isai Gorbov yet, just see if I don't!"

"Why?"

"He's a spy and a squealer. He's the one ruined my father, turned him into a stool pigeon," said Vesovshchikov, looking at Andrei with sullen hostility.

"So that's it!" exclaimed the *khokhol*. "But nobody would be so foolish as to hold that against you."

"The smart ones and the fools are all alike," said Nikolai stubbornly. "Take you and Pavel. You're both smart, but am I the same in your eyes as Feodor Mazin or Samoilov, or as you for each other? Don't lie. I won't believe you anyway. All of you shove me aside, keep me in my place."

"You've got a sick soul, Nikolai," said the *khokhol* softly and gently, sitting down beside him.

"It's sick all right. But so's yours. Only you think what ails you is higher quality than what ails me. We all treat each other like sons of bitches, that's all I can say. We do, don't we? Speak up."

He fixed his sharp eyes on Andrei's face and waited, his teeth bared. His blotched face did not change its expression, but his thick lips twitched.

"I can't say anything," replied the *khokhol*, smiling sadly as he caught Vesovshchikov's hostile glance. "I know it only hurts to argue with a fellow when all the wounds in his heart are bleeding. I know that, brother."

"You and I can't argue—I don't know how," muttered Nikolai dropping his eyes.

"It seems to me," continued the *khokhol*, "that each of us has walked his thorny path, and each of us has groaned like you in his dark hour. . . ."

"There's nothing you can tell me," said Vesovshchikov slowly. "The soul of me is howling like a wolf."

"I don't want to tell you anything. Only I know this'll pass. Maybe not completely, but it'll pass."

He gave a short laugh and continued, slapping Nikolai on the shoulder:

"This is a children's disease like the measles. All of us catch it some time or other. The strong ones get a light case, the weak ones take it harder. It grips us at the very moment when we're finding ourselves, but haven't yet caught a full vision of life and our place in it. It seems to you you're the nicest little pickle on earth, and everybody wants to take a bite out of you. But after a while you see that others have a hunk of soul no worse than yours in their breasts, and that makes things easier. Then you feel ashamed of having climbed up in the belfry with your paltry little bell, too tiny to be heard in the general chiming. But you discover that your bell is a good addition to the chorus of bells, even if the big ones drown it out like a fly in oil if you swing it alone. Do you get what I'm trying to say?"

"Maybe I do," said Nikolai with a shake of his head. "But I—I don't believe anything."

The *khokhol* jumped up with a laugh and began to walk about noisily.

"I didn't use to either, you old load of bricks!"

"Why a load of bricks?" asked Nikolai with a sullen laugh as he glanced at the *khokhol*.

"Because that's what you look like."

Suddenly Nikolai began to roar with laughter, his mouth wide open.

"What's the idea?" asked the surprised *khokhol*, halting in front of him.

"I just thought what a fool anybody'd be to hurt your feelings," answered Nikolai.

"How could anybody hurt my feelings?" the *khokhol* shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," said Vesovshchikov with a good-humoured grin. "I only meant a fellow must feel pretty bad if he ever did hurt you."

"So that's it," laughed the *khokhol*.

"Andryusha!" called the mother from the kitchen.

Andrei went out.

Left to himself, Vesovshchikov glanced round, then stretched out a leg encased in a rough boot, examined it carefully and felt his thick calf. He raised his hand and studied the fat palm and the backs of his stubby fingers, covered with yellow hair. With a disgusted wave of his hand, he got up.

When Andrei brought in the samovar he was standing in front of the mirror.

"First look I've had at this mug of mine for a long time," he said, adding with a wry smile, "Some mug!"

"What do you care?" asked Andrei, glancing at him curiously.

"Sasha says the face mirrors the soul."

"Nonsense!" cried the *khokhol*. "She's got a nose like a fishhook and cheekbones like knife blades, but her soul's like a star."

Nikolai glanced at him and grinned.

They sat down to tea.

Nikolai took a large potato, salted a piece of bread, and began to chew slowly and steadily, like an ox.

"How are things here?" he asked with his mouth full.

When Andrei had given him a cheerful account of how they were spreading propaganda at the factory, he became gloomy again.

"It's taking a long time. Too long. We ought to work faster."

As the mother looked at him a feeling of hostility stirred in her breast.

"Life isn't a horse to be driven with a whip," said Andrei.

Nikolai stubbornly shook his head.

"Too long. I can't wait like this. What shall I do?"

He made a helpless gesture as he looked into the *khokhol's* face, awaiting an answer.

"All of us have to study and teach others, that's what we have to do," said Andrei, dropping his head.

"And when do we begin to fight?" asked Vesovshchikov.

"I don't know when we begin to fight, but I do know that they'll beat us up a good many times before then," replied the *khokhol* with a laugh. "The way I see it, we've got to arm our heads before our hands."

Nikolai began to eat again, while the mother stole shy glances at his broad face, trying to discover something there that would reconcile her to his square, heavy body.

She met the prickly glance of his little eyes, and this set her eyebrows jumping. Andrei was restless. He would suddenly begin to laugh and talk, then abruptly break off and start whistling.

The mother thought she knew what was worrying him. Nikolai sat there brooding, offering curt, reluctant replies to everything the *khokhol* said.

The little room became close and uncomfortable for the mother and Andrei, and first one, then the other would glance furtively at their guest.

At last he got up and said:

"I'd like to go to bed. I nearly went crazy sitting in that jail, then all of a sudden they let me go, and off I went. I'm tired."

He slouched into the kitchen, and after moving about a bit, became utterly still. The mother strained her ears, but there was not a sound.

"He's having dreadful thoughts," she whispered to Andrei.

"He's a difficult one," said the *khokhol* with a shake of his head. "But it'll pass. I was like that once myself. The fire makes a lot of soot before it flares up bright in your heart. Go to bed, *nenko*; I want to read awhile."

She went to the corner where a bed was hidden behind cotton curtains, and for a long time Andrei could hear her sighing and praying. He quickly leafed through his book, rubbed his forehead, twirled his moustache in his long fingers, and shifted his feet. The clock ticked, the wind soughed in the trees.

"Ah, me!" came the mother's soft voice. "So many people in the world, and all of them groaning. I wonder where the happy ones are."

"There *are* happy ones, *nenko*!" replied Andrei. "And soon there'll be lots of them. Lots and lots!"

XXI

Life flowed along quickly, in a succession of eventful days. Each one brought something new, and this no longer alarmed the mother. Ever more frequently her house was visited by unknown people who came in the evening to talk with Andrei in anxious undertones; then they would raise their coat collars, pull their caps down over their eyes and disappear in the darkness without a sound. She was conscious of the suppressed excitement each of them felt. It seemed that they all wanted to sing and laugh, but they had no time; they were always in a hurry. Some were grave and sarcastic; others were gay and sparkling with youthful energy; still others were quiet and thoughtful. The mother found that all of them were confident and persistent, and while they were highly individual, their faces seemed to merge into one face resembling that of Christ on the road to Emmaus: thin and calmly resolute, with clear dark eyes whose glance was at once gentle and severe.

The mother counted their number, mentally assembling a throng about Pavel to hide him from the eyes of the enemy.

One day a pert, curly-haired girl came from town with a package for Andrei. As she was leaving, she turned to the mother with a flash of her merry eyes.

"Good-bye, comrade!" she said.

"Good-bye," answered the mother, restraining a smile.

When she had seen the girl out, she went to the window and smiled as she watched this comrade of hers go down the street with quick little steps, fresh as a spring flower and light as a butterfly.

"Comrade!" murmured the mother when the girl was out of sight. "You dear little thing! God grant that you find a true comrade to go with you all your life!"

9*

There was something childlike in these people from town that made her smile to herself condescendingly. But she was touched and happily surprised by their faith, whose sincerity became more and more evident to her. Her heart was warmed and caressed by their dreams of the triumph of justice, but for some reason she sighed sadly whenever she heard them talk. She was particularly touched by their utter simplicity, and by a fine, sweeping indifference to their own welfare.

She already understood much of what they said about life, she felt that they had discovered the true source of human sorrow and she accepted most of their tenets. But in the depths of her heart she did not believe they would be able to remake life, or rally all the working people about the fire they had kindled. Everyone was bent on filling his belly today; nobody wanted to postpone it until tomorrow.

Few people would consent to tread that long and difficult path; few eyes would catch the marvellous vision of the kingdom of human brotherhood to be reached at the end. For that reason all these good people were like children to her, despite their beards and their mature faces, so often haggard with fatigue.

"You poor dears!" she thought, shaking her head.

But all of them were living an upright, serious, sensible life. They spoke of doing good and did not spare themselves in their effort to teach others what they already knew. She realized how one could love such a life in spite of its danger, and with a sigh she glanced back over the dark, narrow ribbon of her past. Little by little there grew within her a calm consciousness that she herself was important to this new life. Formerly she had never felt that anyone needed her, but now she clearly saw that many people needed her, and this was a new and pleasant realization, one that made her hold her head high.

She carried the leaflets regularly to the factory, looking upon this as her duty. The detectives became used to seeing her, and paid her little notice. Several times they searched her, but always on the day after the appearance of the leaflets. When she had nothing with her, she knew how to arouse the suspicion of the guards, who would seize her and search her, while she argued with them and pretended to be insulted. Having put them to shame, she would go away, proud of her ingenuity. This was a game she enjoyed.

Vesovshchikov was not taken back at the factory. He got a job with a lumber-dealer, hauling logs, boards and firewood. The mother saw him pass with his load almost every day: first came a pair of skinny black horses whose legs trembled under the strain of their effort and whose heads bobbed wearily as they blinked their dull and tortured eyes; behind them jerked a long wet log or a pile of boards that clapped together noisily; beside the horse walked Nikolai, holding the reins loosely in his hands. Dirty, ragged, in heavy boots, his cap pushed to the back of his head, he looked as thick and clumsy as a stump wrenched out of the ground. He too bobbed his head as he walked with his eyes bent on the ground. His horses blindly stumbled into carts and people coming in their direction. Sharp cries were directed at Nikolai and angry oaths besieged him like a swarm of wasps. He neither answered nor lifted his head, simply giving a piercing whistle and muttering to his horses, "Get along there!"

Whenever Andrei called together his comrades to read the latest copy of a foreign newspaper or leaflet, Nikolai would come and take a seat in the corner, silently listening for an hour or two. After the reading, the young people would carry on a heated discussion in which Vesovshchikov never took part. But he sat on when everyone else had left and talked to Andrei alone.

"Who is most to blame?" he would ask sullenly.

"The person to blame is the first one who ever said 'this is mine!' That fellow died a few thousand years ago, so there's no sense in being angry with him," answered the *khokhol* jokingly, but his eyes were uneasy.

"What about the rich? And those who back them up?"

The *khokhol* toyed with his hair and pulled at his moustache as he selected simple words in which to tell what he knew about life and people. According to him, all people were to blame, and this did not satisfy Nikolai. Compressing his thick lips, he would shake his head and mutter denials. At last he would take his leave, glum and dissatisfied.

"Certain people must be to blame," he said one day. "And those people are right here. We've got to plough up the whole of our life like a field of weeds, without a drop of mercy!"

"That's what Isai the timekeeper said about you one day," recalled the mother.

"Isai?" asked Vesovshchikov, after a pause.

"Yes. He's a dreadful man. Keeps snooping around and asking all sorts of questions. He's started coming over here and peeking in the window."

"Peeking in the window?" repeated Nikolai.

The mother was in bed, so she could not see his face, but she realized the folly of her words from the way the *khokhol* hastened to say, "Let him come peeking if he's got so much time on his hands."

"Nothing of the sort," said Nikolai. "*He's* one of those who are to blame."

"What's he to blame for?" asked the *khokhol* quickly. "For being a fool?"

Vesovshchikov went out without answering.

The *khokhol* began to walk slowly and wearily about the room, his long, spidery legs making a rustling sound. He had taken off his boots, as he always did, so as not to disturb Pelagea. But she was not asleep.

"I'm afraid of him," she said anxiously when Nikolai had left.

"Hm-m," drawled the *khokhol*. "He's dead in earnest. Don't mention Isai to him again, *nenko*. Isai really is a spy."

"That's not strange," answered the mother. "His godfather was a gendarme."

"Nikolai might give him a beating one of these days," continued the *khokhol* uneasily. "See the feelings the honourable gentlemen in power have nurtured in the common people? What will happen when men like Nikolai realize how they have been wronged and come to the end of their tether? Heaven and earth will be drenched in blood."

"How dreadful, Andryusha!" exclaimed the mother softly.

"Well, don't eat flies and you won't throw up," said Andrei after a minute. "But every drop of the bosses' blood will be diluted in the oceans of tears they've made the common people shed." He gave a soft little laugh and added, "Not very comforting, but it's true."

XXII

One Sunday the mother came home after doing some shopping, opened the door and stopped on the threshold, transfixed with joy: from the inner room came the sound of Pavel's strong voice.

"Here she is!" cried the *khokhol*.

The mother saw Pavel turn quickly, and a light broke over his face, full of promise for her.

"Home at last!" she stammered and sat down, overcome by the unexpectedness of his return.

He bent his pale face over her; his lips were trembling and tears glistened in the corner of his eye. For a second he said nothing, and his mother, too, stared at him in silence.

The *khokhol* left them and went out into the yard, whistling softly.

"Thanks, mother!" said Pavel in a low voice, squeezing her hand with trembling fingers. "Thank you, dearest."

Overwhelmed by the joy of seeing that expression on his face and hearing that gentleness in his voice, she stroked her son's head and tried to calm the wild pounding of her heart.

"Goodness gracious, what for?" she said.

"For helping in our great work. Thank you," he repeated. "It's a rare happiness when a fellow can say that he and his mother are kindred spirits."

She was silent, eagerly drinking in his words and admiring this son who stood before her, so good, so beloved.

"I could see how hard it was for you, mother. How much of it was not to your liking. And I thought you would never accept us, that our thoughts would never become your thoughts, and that you would just go on suffering in silence as you had suffered all your life. That was hard for me."

"Andryusha helped me understand many things," she said.

"He told me about you," laughed Pavel.

"Yegor too. He and I are from the same village. Andryusha even wanted to teach me to read."

"And you were ashamed, and began to study all by yourself on the sly."

"So he guessed!" she exclaimed. Restless with the surfeit of joy in her heart, she said, "Let's call him in. He went out on purpose so's not to be in the way. He has no mother of his own."

"Andrei!" called Pavel, opening the door on to the porch. "Where are you?"

"Here I am. Want to chop a little wood."

"Come in!"

He did not come immediately, and when at last he entered the kitchen, he began to talk about household affairs.

"I must ask Nikolai to bring us some wood. Not much left. Just take a look at your Pavel, *nenko*. Instead of punishing the rebels, the bosses seem to have fed them up."

The mother laughed. She was still dizzy with joy and her heart throbbed sweetly, but a sense of prudence and propriety made her anxious to see her son his usual calm self. Everything was too wonderful, and she wanted this first great happiness in her life to be preserved in her heart for all time as strong and vital as at this moment. Fearing it might diminish, she hurried to cage it up, like a birdman who has unexpectedly caught a rare specimen.

"Let's have dinner. I don't suppose you've had any, Pasha?" she said, bustling about.

"No. Yesterday the jailor told me they had decided to let me go, so I couldn't eat or drink a thing."

"The first person I met when I got out was Sizov," Pavel went on. "He crossed the street to say hullo when he saw me. I told him he better be careful, I'm a dangerous person these days—under the surveillance of the police. He said it didn't matter and asked me all sorts of things about his nephew. Asked me if Feodor was behaving himself in jail. 'How can you behave yourself in jail?' I answered. 'Well,' he said, 'I hope he hasn't been squealing on any of his comrades.' When I told him Feodor was a good fellow, honest and clever, he patted his beard and said proudly, 'There aren't any black sheep among us Sizovs.'"

"The old man's got brains," said the *khokhol*, nodding his head. "I've had lots of talks with him. A good sort. Are they going to let Feodor out soon?"

"I think they'll let them all out. They haven't anything against them except what old Isai says, and what could that be?"

The mother moved back and forth, without taking her eyes off her son. Andrei stood at the window with his hands behind his back, listening to what he was saying. Pavel paced the floor. He had let his beard grow, and little rings of fine, dark hair curled thickly on his cheeks, softening the swarthiness of his complexion.

"Sit down," said the mother, bringing in the dinner.

During the meal Andrei told Pavel about Rybin. When he had finished, Pavel exclaimed regretfully:

"If I'd been home, I wouldn't have let him go," said Pavel regretfully when Andrei had finished. "What had he to take with him? Nothing but a muddled head and a lot of hard feelings."

"Well, when a fellow's reached the age of forty, and has spent most of that time grappling with the bears in his soul, it's not easy to make him over," said the *khokhol* with a laugh.

One of those arguments began in which most of the words were hard for the mother to grasp. Dinner was over, but they kept on pounding each other with high-sounding words. Occasionally they spoke simply.

"We have to press forward; not a single step back," said Pavel firmly.

"And bump into tens of millions of people who will take us for their enemies?"

As the mother listened to them argue, she realized that Pavel had no use for the peasants, while the *khokhol* stood up for them, trying to prove that the muzhiks, too, had to be shown what was right. She understood Andrei better, and felt that he was right, but every time he said something to Pavel, she grew tense and guarded, waiting breathlessly for her son's answer to make sure that the *khokhol* had not offended him. But they kept on shouting at each other without taking offence.

"Is it really so, Pavel?" she would sometimes ask her son.

"It really is," he would answer with a smile.

"Ah, my good man," said the *khokhol* with friendly sarcasm, "you've had a fine meal, but you've chewed your food badly; there's something sticking in your throat. Better take a drop."

"Funny, aren't you?" said Pavel.

"Jolly as a funeral feast."

The mother laughed softly and shook her head.

XXIII

Spring came, and the snow melted, exposing the mud and dirt beneath. With every day the mud became more and more noticeable; the settlement looked ragged and unkempt. During the day water dripped off the roofs and moisture oozed like sweat out of the grey walls of the houses, but at night the icicles still gleamed whitely. The sun lingered longer in the sky, and there was no mistaking the murmur of the streams running down into the swamp.

Preparations were begun for celebrating May Day.

Leaflets explaining the significance of this holiday were scattered through the factory and settlement. Even the young people who had not been affected by the propaganda said as they read them, "We'll have to make preparations."

"High time!" said Vesovshchikov with a sullen smile. "We've had enough playing at hide-and-seek!"

Feodor Mazin was full of enthusiasm. He was like a caged lark, so thin had he become and so nervously tremulous in speech and movements. He was always accompanied by the silent Yakov Somov, a lad too serious for his years. Yakov now had a job in town. Samoilov (whose hair seemed to have grown redder during his term in jail) as well as Vasili Gusev, Bukin, Dragunov and a few others, insisted that they should hold an armed demonstration, but Pavel, the *khokhol*, Somov and some others objected.

Their arguments were reduced to a joke by Yegor, who was as weary, out of breath, and perspiring, as ever.

"Our labours to change the existing social system are noble indeed, comrades, but in order to expedite our success, it is imperative that I buy myself a new pair of boots" (pointing to his wet and ragged shoes). "My galoshes have also reached a state defying rehabilitation, so that every day I get my feet wet. I have no desire to take up quarters in the bowels of the earth until such time as we make a public and uncompromising denunciation of the old order, and therefore I reject Comrade Samoilov's suggestion that we hold an armed demonstration, countering it with my own suggestion that I be equipped with a new pair of boots, for it is my profound conviction that such a measure will do more to hasten the triumph of socialism than even a first-class free-for-all!"

In the same flowery language he told the workers how people in other lands were struggling to ease their lives. The mother loved to listen to his speeches, and they left her with a strange impression: it seemed that the most vicious enemies of the people, those who most often deceived them and were most cruel to them, were fat, red-faced little men, mean, greedy, sly and cruel. When they were themselves hard-pressed by the tsar of their land, they set the common people on him, and when the people had overthrown their ruler, these little men seized the power by fraud, driving the people back to their hovels, or, if they resisted, killing hundreds and thousands of them.

One day the mother took her courage in both hands and described to Yegor the picture painted in her imagination by his speeches.

"Is that the way it is, Yegor Ivanovich?" she asked with an embarrassed smile.

He burst out laughing, rolling his eyes and rubbing his chest as he gasped for breath.

"That's exactly how it is, mother! You've taken the bull of history by the horns! There's a little ornamentation here, a little fancywork woven into the background, but the facts are all in their right places! It's just these fat little men who are the biggest sinners and the most poisonous parasites feeding on the people. The French were right in calling them 'bourgeois'—remember that, mother—*boor*-geois for it's boors they are, smashing their fists into all those whose ignorance they can take advantage of, and sucking their blood. . . ."

"You mean the rich do this?" asked the mother.

"Yes. It's their misfortune that they're rich. If you keep putting copper in an infant's food, it stunts the growth of its bones and the child becomes a dwarf, but if you poison a person with gold, his soul becomes stunted—little and grey and lifeless, like one of those rubber balls the children buy for five kopeks."

One day when they were speaking of Yegor, Pavel said, "The fact is, Andrei, people who joke the most are usually the ones who suffer the most."

The *khokhol* paused before answering and narrowed his eyes.

"If you're right, then you'd expect the whole of Russia to die of laughter."

Natasha put in her appearance. She too had been in jail, though in another town. The experience did not seem to have changed her. The mother noticed that the *khokhol* was livelier in her presence, cracking jokes and poking fun at everybody all the time. But when Natasha left, he began whistling mournful tunes, and shuffling dejectedly up and down the room.

Sasha often ran in for a second; she was always frowning and in a hurry, and for some reason she grew more and more angular and abrupt.

Once when Pavel went out into the entrance to say good-bye to her, forgetting to close the door behind him, the mother overheard their hurried conversation:

"Are *you* going to carry the banner?" asked the girl.

"Yes."

"Is that final?"

"Yes. That's my privilege."

"So it's back to jail?"

Pavel did not answer.

"Couldn't you . . ." she began, but broke off.

"What?"

"Let somebody else do it?"

"No," he said firmly.

"Think it over. You have such influence. Everybody likes you. You and Andrei are the most popular. Just think how much good you can do here! But if you carry the banner they'll send you into exile—far away—and for a long time.

The mother could detect the familiar emotions of fear and longing in the girl's voice. Sasha's words fell on her heart like drops of ice water.

"I've made up my mind," said Pavel. "Nothing can make me change it."

"Not even if I ask you to?"

Pavel's voice suddenly sounded quick and harsh.

"You have no business to say that. You have no right."

"I'm only human," she said softly.

"A wonderful human!" he replied just as softly, but as though he were choking. "One who is very dear to me. And that's why—that's why—you shouldn't say such things."

"Good-bye," said the girl.

From the patter of her heels the mother could tell she had broken into a run. Pavel went into the garden after her.

The mother's heart contracted with fear. She did not quite understand what they had been talking about, but she sensed that some great misfortune was in store for her.

"What could he be planning to do?" she thought.

Pavel came back accompanied by Andrei.

"Oh, Isai, Isai! What shall we do with him?" said the *khokhol,* shaking his head.

"We'd better warn him to chuck that business," said Pavel with a frown.

"Pavel, what are you planning to do?" asked his mother, lowering her head.

"When? Now?"

"No. On the First of May."

"Oh," said Pavel, dropping his voice. "I'm going to carry our banner at the head of the column. For that I suppose they'll put me back in jail."

The mother's eyes began to smart and her mouth went dry. He took her hand and stroked it.

"I must. Try to understand, mother."

"I didn't say anything," she replied, slowly lifting her head. But when her eyes met the stubborn glint in his, she quailed.

He sighed and let go of her hand.

"It should make you glad instead of miserable," he said reproachfully. "When will we ever have mothers who send their sons to death with a smile?"

"Humph!" muttered the *khokhol*. "'Came the lord mayor with his nose in the air. . . .'"

"I didn't say anything, did I?" repeated the mother. "I won't stand in your way. But it's hard for me—I can't help being a mother. . . ."

He moved away from her, and his next words stung her cruelly.

"There is a sort of love which keeps a man from doing what he wants to do," he said.

"Don't, Pasha," she said with a shudder, fearing he might say something else to wound her. "I understand—you can't do anything else—for the sake of your comrades. . . ."

"Not for their sakes, but for my own," he corrected.

Andrei appeared in the doorway, which was too low for him, so that he stood with his knees bent strangely, one shoulder against the jamb, his head and other shoulder thrust forward.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to drop this, your lordship," he said sullenly, fixing his prominent eyes on Pavel's face. He looked like a lizard in the crevice of a rock.

The mother was on the verge of tears.

"Dear me, I almost forgot—" she muttered, hurrying out into the entrance so that her son should not see her crying. Once outside, she huddled in the corner and gave way to silent sobs, as enervating as if her heart's blood flowed with her tears.

Through the half-open door she heard them arguing in low voices.

"What's the idea? Does it give you pleasure to hurt her?" asked the *khokhol*.

"You have no right to say that!" cried Pavel.

"A fine friend I'd be if I kept my mouth shut and let you make an idiot of yourself. Why did you have to say that? Can't you see what's happening?"

"You have to be firm and not be afraid to say 'yes' and 'no'."

"To her?"

"To everybody. I don't want love or friendship that hangs on to your legs, holding you back. . . ."

"What a hero! Go and wipe your nose! Tell that to Sasha. She's the one. . . ."

"I've already told her."

"Oh no you haven't! You spoke to her gently, lovingly. I know you did, even if I didn't hear you. But you had to be the big hero to your mother! All your swagger's not worth a snap of the finger, if you want to know it!"

Pelagea quickly wiped her tears. In her fear that the *khokhol* would say something too rash, she quickly opened the door and entered the kitchen.

"Br-r-r! How cold it is!" she said loudly, her voice shaking with fear and grief. "Who'd think it was spring?"

She shifted things aimlessly from one place to another, trying to drown the voices in the next room.

"Everything's changed," she went on, still louder. "People are getting hotter, the weather colder. Used to be warm by this time—sun and a clear sky. . . ."

The voices broke off. She stood in the middle of the kitchen floor listening.

"Did you hear that?" said the *khokhol* softly. "It's time you understood, damn it all! She's got more courage than you have!"

"Shall we have tea?" she asked in a trembling voice, hastening to explain the tremble by adding, "Goodness, I'm quite frozen!"

Slowly Pavel went to her. His head was bent and a guilty smile hovered about his lips.

"Forgive me, mother. I'm still a youngster—and a fool."

"Leave me alone!" she cried miserably, hugging his head to her breast. "Don't say a word! God knows your life's your own to do with as you please. But leave my heart alone! Can a mother help loving? She has to. I love you all. You're all dear to me, and you all deserve to be loved. Who is to love you, if I don't? You'll go away—and the others will follow you—giving up everything—ah, Pasha!"

Great, burning thoughts throbbed in her breast. Her heart was buoyant with a grievous joy which she could find no words to express, and in her inarticulate torture she looked at her son with eyes glowing with sharp, intense pain.

"It's all right, mother. Forgive me, I see it all now. And I'll never forget it, I swear I won't!" He turned away with a smile, happy but ashamed.

She left him and went to the door of the other room.

"Andryusha," she said in a tone of gentle appeal. "Don't shout at him. You're older. . . ."

"Woo-o-f-f! I'll not only shout at him! I'll knock the stuffings out of him!" he exclaimed without turning round.

She went up to him and held out her hand.

"You're so good!"

He whirled round and went past her into the kitchen with his hands behind his back and his head lowered like a bull's. She heard him speaking in a tone of fierce ridicule.

"Get away, Pavel, before I bite your head off! Don't take me seriously, *nenko,* I'm just joking. Here, I'll light the samovar. Fine charcoal you have—all wet!"

He grew silent. When the mother entered the kitchen he was sitting on the floor blowing up the samovar.

"Have no fear, I won't touch him!" he said without looking up. "I'm as soft as a boiled turnip! And I—hold your ears, hero!—and I'm really very fond of him. But I don't like that waistcoat he's wearing. You see he has a new waistcoat and he thinks it's handsome, so he goes round with his belly sticking out, knocking into everybody and saying, 'Just look what a fine new waiscoat I have!' The waistcoat's all right, but why knock into everybody? Hard enough to avoid people as it is!"

"How long are you going to keep this up?" said Pavel with a short laugh. "You gave it to me once; let's call it quits."

The *khokhol* stretched his legs out on either side of the samovar, and glanced up at him from the floor. The mother stood in the doorway gazing affectionately at the back of his head. He twisted his body round, bracing himself with his arms, and looked at mother and son, his eyes suddenly red.

"Rather nice you are, both of you," he said, blinking.

Pavel bent down and grasped his hand.

"Don't pull," said the *khokhol*. "You'll upset me."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the mother. "Go ahead and kiss each other. Hug each other as tight as you can."

"Shall we?" asked Pavel.

"Come on," said the *khokhol*, getting up.

They embraced strongly—two bodies and one spirit aflame with friendship. Tears flowed down the mother's cheeks, but this time they were tears of happiness.

"Women love to cry," she said shamefacedly as she wiped them away. "Cry when they're happy, cry when they're sad."

The *khokhol* pushed Pavel gently away.

"That's enough," he said, wiping his eyes too. "The calf has had its bit of fun, now it's time to roast it. Damn those coals of yours! I blew so hard I got an eyeful!"

"There's nothing shameful about such tears," said Pavel softly, sitting down by the window.

His mother went over and took her place beside him. Her heart was filled with new courage, which made her calm and contented in spite of her sadness.

"I'll carry in the tea things, don't get up, *nenko*," said the *khokhol*, going out of the room. "You'd better rest up a bit after having the heart squeezed out of you like that."

The sound of his rich voice came back to them.

"We had a fine taste of life just now; a bit of warm human life," he said.

"Yes," said Pavel, glancing at his mother.

"And it's made everything different," she said. "Our suffering's different and so is our joy."

"That's how it ought to be!" said the *khokhol*. "Because a new heart's being born, *nenko*. A new heart's being born to life. Man is striding ahead, pouring the light of reason on the world and calling as he goes: 'People of all lands, unite in one family!' And in answer to his call all sound hearts join to form one huge heart, as strong and sonorous as a silver bell."

The mother shut her lips tightly to keep them from trembling, and closed her eyes to hold back the tears.

Pavel raised his arm as though to speak, but the mother drew him toward her.

"Don't interrupt him," she whispered.

The *khokhol* came and stood in the doorway. "People will see a lot of sorrow yet, and a lot of blood is yet to be shed; but all of my suffering and all of my blood is little to pay for what I already hold in my breast and my brain. I am as rich as a star, with all its rays. I can bear anything, endure anything, because I have a great joy which nothing and no one can ever take away from me. And this joy is my strength!"

They sat over their tea until midnight, talking intimately of life and people and the future.

Whenever an idea became clear to the mother, she reached with a sigh into her past for some coarse and unpleasant recollection to serve as a stone to support the idea.

Her fears melted in the warm flow of their conversation; she felt just as she had felt that day long ago when her father had said to her sternly:

"No sense in making a face! If somebody's turned up who's fool enough to take you to wife, grab the chance! All the hens get married, and they all have children who bring them nothing but a pack of trouble. You're no different from the rest."

After this she had seen the hopeless path stretching before her, winding through a dark, barren waste. And the very inevitability of taking this path had filled her with a blind peace. That's how it was now. But as she sensed the approach of new sorrow, she kept saying spitefully to some unknown person:

"Here, take that!"

This eased her aching heart, which hummed and vibrated like a taut string.

But secretly she nursed the faint but persistent hope that they would not snatch everything away from her—not every last thing! Surely something would remain!

XXIV

Early one morning, when Pavel and Andrei had just left for work, Korsunova knocked at the window.

"They've killed Isai!" she cried. "Let's go and see!"

The mother started up, and through her mind flashed the name of the murderer.

"Who did it?" she asked as she threw a shawl about her shoulders.

"Do you think the one who did is sitting there beside Isai? He ran away as soon as he knocked him off."

As they were going down the street she said, "There'll be new searches made now, trying to find who did it. It's a good thing your men were home last night. I'm witness to that. I came home after midnight and peeked in your window. You were all sitting round the table."

"Good heavens, Maria! How could anybody suspect them?" she exclaimed in fright.

"Well, who could've killed him? Must've been someone connected with your men," said Korsunova with conviction. "Everybody knows he spied on them."

The mother stopped, unable to breathe, pressing her hand to her breast.

"What's the matter? Don't you fear, he only got what was coming to him! Hurry, or they'll take him away!"

The mother's suspicions of Vesovshchikov were like a heavy hand holding her back.

"He's gone the limit," she thought.

On a spot not far from the factory where a house had burned down stood a crowd of people buzzing like wasps, trampling over the charred timber and stirring up the ashes. There were many women and still more children among them, as well as shopkeepers, waiters from the tavern, policemen and the gendarme Petlin, a tall old man with a fluffy grey beard and a chestful of medals.

Isai was half sitting, half lying on the ground, propped up against a charred log, his bared head drooping over his right shoulder. His right hand was thrust into the pocket of his trousers, while the fingers of his left hand were dug into the loose earth.

The mother looked into his face. One lustreless eye stared at the cap lying between his outstretched legs; his mouth hung half open, as if in surprise, and his red beard was askew. His thin body with its pointed head and lean freckled face looked smaller than ever, shrunken by death. The mother crossed herself and gave a sigh. He had been repulsive to her when alive, but now she pitied him.

"No blood," observed someone in a hushed voice. "Must've struck him with his fist."

"He's had his trap shut for him, the dirty squealer," said someone else vengefully.

The gendarme, instantly alert, pushed past the women.

"Who's talking there?" he asked threateningly.

The people made way for him. Some of them hurried off, one man gave a vicious laugh.

The mother went home.

"No one feels sorry for him," she thought to herself.

In her mind's eye she saw the dumpy Nikolai looking at her with hard, cold eyes, his right arm swinging as though he had just hurt it.

As soon as her son and Andrei came home, she asked them about it.

"Has anyone been arrested yet?"

"Haven't heard," answered the *khokhol*.

She could see that both of them were feeling depressed.

"Has anyone mentioned Nikolai?" she inquired softly.

"No," said her son; his eyes were stern and his tone significant. "And I don't think they suspect him. He's away. He went off to the river at noon yesterday, and hasn't returned yet. I asked about him."

"Praise the Lord!" said the mother with a sigh of relief. "Praise the Lord!"

The *khokhol* glanced at her and hung his head.

"There he lies looking as if he didn't know what to make of it all," mused the mother. "And nobody feels sorry for him, nobody has a kind word for him. So little and insignificant. Like something chopped off and left to lie there."

During dinner Pavel suddenly threw down his spoon.

"It's beyond me!" he cried.

"What?" asked the *khokhol*.

"We kill cattle to get food, and that's bad enough. And we have to kill wild beasts if they're dangerous. I myself could kill a human being who turned into a beast and preyed on his fellow men. But to make off with a poor wretch like him—how could anyone raise his hand to do it?"

The *khokhol* shrugged his shoulders.

"He was as harmful as any wild beast," he said. "We kill mosquitoes for sucking just a drop of our blood."

"That's true. But I don't mean that. I mean it'd be sickening."

"No help for it," replied Andrei with another shrug.

"Could *you* kill such a creature?" asked Pavel after a long pause.

The *khokhol* fastened his large eyes on him, then glanced swiftly at the mother.

"For the sake of my comrades and of our cause, I could do anything," he said firmly. "I could even kill my own son."

"Oh, Andryusha!" exclaimed the mother softly.

"No help for it, mother," he smiled. "Life is like that."

"You're right," said Pavel. "Life is like that."

Suddenly Andrei jumped up in a state of great agitation, driven by some inner force.

"What can we do about it?" he cried, waving his arms. "We're forced to hate people so that the time will come when we can love them all. We have to wipe out anyone who stands in the way of progress, anyone who sells people for money to buy himself honour or security. If there's some Judas barring the way for honest people and waiting for a chance to betray them, I myself would be a Judas if I didn't destroy him. You say I have no right? But those bosses of ours—have they a right to keep their troops and hangmen, their brothels and jails, their places of exile and all the other accursed means by which they guard their comfort and security? Is it my fault if sometimes I'm forced to take their club in my own hand? I'll take it without a qualm. If they kill us by the tens and hundreds, I have a right to raise my arm and bring it down on the head of one of them, on the head that has come closer to me than any of the others and is more harmful than the others to the cause I defend. Life is like that. But I'm against such a life; I don't want it to be like that. I know that nothing will ever come of their blood; it's barren blood. The truth springs up when our blood is scattered like abundant rain over the earth. But their blood just dries up. I know that. But I take this sin upon myself—I'll kill if I see it has to be done. Mind, I'm only talking for myself. My sin will die with me. It won't leave a blot on the future. It won't stain anybody but myself, not a soul!"

He walked up and down the room, gesturing as though he were chopping something away, freeing himself of it. The mother watched him in sorrow and alarm, sensing that something inside him had broken, and that it was painful. The dark, dangerous thoughts of the murder had left her. If Vesovshchikov had not committed the crime, none of Pavel's other friends could have done it. Pavel sat with drooping head, listening to the *khokhol's* insistent tirade.

"Sometimes you have to go against yourself if you want to keep going forward. You have to be able to give everything. Your whole heart. It's easy to give your life for the cause. You have to give more—what's dearer to you than your own life. And by giving this, you strengthen the truth you're fighting for, the truth which is the dearest thing in the world to you!"

He halted in the centre of the room—pale, his eyes half closed, one arm upraised in solemn promise.

"I know the time will come when people will wonder at their own beauty, when each will be like a star to all the others. The earth will be peopled with free men, great in their freedom. The hearts of all will be open, and every heart will be innocent of envy and malice. Then life will be transformed into the great service of Man, and Man will have become something fine and exalted, for all things are attainable to those who are free. Then people will live in truth and freedom for the sake of beauty, and the best people will be accounted those whose hearts are most capable of embracing the world and of loving it, those who are most free, for in them lies the greatest beauty. They will be great people, those of the new life!"

He paused a minute, and then, drawing himself up, added in a voice which came from the depths of his soul, "And for the sake of that life I am ready to do anything at all."

A spasm passed over his face, and large tears flowed down his cheeks.

Pavel blanched and raised his head, looking at him wide-eyed. The mother started up as some dark premonition rose and grew in her.

"What is it, Andrei?" asked Pavel softly.

The *khokhol* gave a shake of his head, drew himself up to full height and looked straight at the mother.

"I saw it happen. I know everything."

She rushed over and grasped his hands. He tried to free his right one, but she clung to it.

"Hush! Oh, my dear, my darling boy!" she whispered.

"Wait," muttered the *khokhol* hoarsely. "I'll tell you how it was."

"No, don't," she murmured, gazing at him through her tears. "Don't, Andryusha."

Pavel came over slowly. He was pale and his eyes were also moist.

"Mother's afraid it was you," he said with a short laugh.

"I'm not afraid. I don't believe it! I wouldn't believe it if I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Wait!" said the *khokhol,* twisting his head and trying to free his hands. "It wasn't me, but I could have stopped it."

"Hush, Andrei!" said Pavel.

He took his friend's hand in one of his own and placed the other on the *khokhol's* shoulder as if to quiet the trembling of the tall body.

"You know I didn't want it to happen, Pavel," said Andrei in a broken voice. "It was like this: when you left me there on the corner with Dragunov, Isai came and stood watching us and sneering at us. Dragunov said, 'See him? He's been following me all night. I'll give him a thrashing yet.' Then he went off—home, I thought. And Isai came over to me." The *khokhol* took a deep breath. "Nobody ever insulted me like he did then, the dog!"

The mother silently led him to the table and had him sit down. She sat next to him, her shoulder touching his. Pavel remained standing, plucking unhappily at his beard.

"He told me they knew all our names, that all of us were on the gendarmes' list and would be arrested just before our May Day celebration. I didn't answer, just laughed at him, but I was boiling inside. He said I was a smart chap and it was a pity I had chosen this path. It would be better if I. . . ."

He stopped and wiped his face with his left hand. His eyes had a dry shine to them.

"I understand," said Pavel.

"It would be better to serve the law, he said."

The *khokhol* shook his fist. "The law—God damn his soul!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "It'd be better if he'd struck me in the face. It'd have been easier for me, and maybe for him. I couldn't stand his spitting in my heart with that stinking sputum of his!"

Andrei snatched his hand out of Pavel's with a convulsive movement and went on in a low voice, full of repugnance, "I struck him in the face and walked away. Then I heard Dragunov behind me say softly, 'Caught you at last!' He must have been waiting round the corner." The *khokhol* paused. "I didn't turn round, though I had a feeling—I heard the blow. But I kept on my way as if I had stepped on a toad. At work they came crying, 'They've killed Isai!' I couldn't believe it. But my arm began to ache so that I could hardly work. It didn't exactly hurt; it was as though it had withered." He cast a furtive glance at his hand. "I suppose I won't be able to wash off that filthy stain all my life."

"The important thing is that your heart's clean," said the mother softly.

"I don't blame myself for it—oh no!" said the *khokhol* firmly. "Only it's sickening. I needn't have got mixed up in it."

"I don't understand you," said Pavel with a shrug of his shoulders. "You didn't do the killing, but even if you had—"

"Listen, brother—if you know a killing's going on and you don't stop it—"

"I don't understand you," insisted Pavel. "That is, perhaps I do, but it doesn't touch me."

The whistle blew. The *khokhol* listened to its imperious summons, then threw back his head.

"I'm not going back to work," he said.

"Neither am I," said Pavel.

"I'm going to the bathhouse." Andrei gave a short laugh and began to collect his clothes. He left the house in low spirits.

The mother followed him with a sympathetic glance.

"You can say what you like, Pavel," she said. "I know it's a sin to kill a man, but I don't hold anybody guilty. I feel sorry for Isai, he was such a nobody. When I looked at him today I remembered that he had threatened to hang you, but it didn't make me hate him or be glad he was dead. I simply felt sorry for him. But now—I don't even feel sorry." She became silent and thoughtful before she added, with a smile of surprise, "Dear me, hear what I'm saying, Pasha?"

Evidently he did not, for he answered gloomily, as he paced the floor with downcast eyes, "That's life for you! See how people are set against each other? You find yourself striking someone without wanting to. And who is it you strike? Some poor creature who has no more rights than you have. In this case he's even less fortunate than you, because he's stupid. The police and the gendarmes and the spies are all our enemies. But all of them are people like us, who have the blood sucked out of them in the same way and are looked down upon just as we are. We're all the same. But the bosses have set people against each other, blinding them with fear and nonsense, tying them hand and foot, squeezing them and sucking their blood, making them beat and crush each other. They've turned people into guns and clubs and stones, and say: 'That is the State.'"

He went over to his mother.

"It's criminal, mother. The vicious murdering of millions of people. The murdering of human souls. Do you see it? Killers of souls. And do you see the difference between them and us? When we strike a fellow it is disgusting, shameful, hurtful—mostly disgusting. But they kill thousands of people calmly and mercilessly, without any qualms and with the greatest satisfaction. And their only reason for crushing people to death is to preserve their silver and gold and securities and all the miserable stuff which enables them to enslave us. Think of it—it isn't their lives they're defending when they murder people and mutilate their souls—not their lives, but their possessions! The things that are outside a man, not what's within him."

Taking her hands in his, he bent over them and pressed them.

"If you could only see how low and shameful it was, you would understand the truth we are fighting for. You would see how fine and great it is."

The mother got up, deeply moved, and filled with the desire to have the fire smouldering in her breast unite with her son's fire to form one great flame.

"Be patient, Pavel," she murmured with difficulty, "Be patient. I'll see it in time."

XXV

Somebody stepped noisily on to the porch, and mother and son looked at each other in surprise.

The door opened slowly and Rybin came in.

"Here I am!" he said, raising his head with a smile. "Doubting Thomas, true to promise, travels here, travels there, pokes his nose in everywhere!"

He was wearing bast sandals, a shaggy cap and a sheepskin covered with tar. A pair of black mittens was thrust into his belt.

"How's your health? So they let you out, Pavel? Good. How you getting along, Pelagea Nilovna?" He bared his white teeth in a broad grin; his voice had become more gentle and his face more heavily overgrown with beard.

The mother was glad to see him and went over to grasp his huge hand which was covered with black stains.

"Goodness!" she said, taking a deep breath of the pungent, wholesome odour of tar. "How glad I am to see you!"

"There's a muzhik for you!" said Pavel with a smile as he gazed at Rybin.

Their visitor slowly took off his things.

"Yes, I'm back to being a muzhik. You keep getting more like the gentlefolk, I keep moving in the other direction."

He walked about the room examining everything as he pulled down his colourful blouse.

"Nothing new here except books. Hm. Well, tell me the news."

He sat down with his legs planted far apart and his hands grasping his knees, searching Pavel's face with his dark eyes and smiling as he waited for an answer.

"We're making progress," said Pavel.

"We plough and sow and watch it grow, then we brew our beer and sleep out the year—that's how it is, eh friends?" laughed Rybin.

"How are you getting along, Mikhailo Ivanovich?" asked Pavel, sitting down opposite him.

"All right. Living in Yegildeyevo—ever heard of it? Yegildeyevo. Nice little town. Two fairs a year. Over two thousand inhabitants. A poor lot. No land of their own—have to rent it. And poor land at that. I've hired myself out to one of the blood-suckers there. The place is as full of them as a corpse is of worms. Burn coal and make tar. Earn a quarter of what I earned here and work twice as hard. Hm. Seven of us working for him, that blood-sucker. Good fellows, all young, all local fellows except me, and they all know how to read and write. One of them, Yefim, is so hot-headed I don't know what to do with him."

"How do you work? Hold discussions with them?" asked Pavel eagerly.

"I don't keep my tongue in my head, you can be sure of that! Took all your leaflets with me—thirty-four in all. But I use the Bible mostly. Plenty to be got out of the Bible. A thick book and an official one, sanctioned by the Holy Synod. You can put your faith in it."

He laughed and gave Pavel a wink.

"But that's not enough. I've come to ask you for books. There are two of us; I've brought Yefim with me. They sent us here with a load of tar, so we made a little detour and came to see you. Give me the books before that Yefim comes. He shouldn't know too much."

As the mother gazed at Rybin, she felt that not only his clothes were different. His manner was less forbidding, his glance more cunning, his eyes less frank than they had been.

"Mother," said Pavel, "would you mind going for the books? The people there know which ones. Tell them they're to be sent to the country."

"Very well," said the mother. "I'll go as soon as the samovar boils."

"You mixed up in this business too, Pelagea Nilovna?" laughed Rybin. "Hm. Plenty of people out there want books. That's the work of the local teacher; they say he's a good fellow, though he comes from the clergy. And there's another teacher, a woman, about seven versts away. Neither of them use forbidden books. Scared of losing their jobs. But it's the forbidden books I need—ones with a little pepper in them. If the books I pass out fall into the hands of the police inspector or the priest, who'll they blame but those teachers? Meanwhile I'll hide away and bide my time."

He grinned, very much pleased with his own cleverness.

"Aha!" thought the mother. "You look like a bear, but you're really a fox!"

"If they suspect the teachers of spreading forbidden literature, will they put them in jail?" asked Pavel.

"Sure they will," answered Rybin. "What of it?"

"But you're the guilty one, not they. It's you who should go to jail."

"You're a funny fellow!" laughed Rybin, slapping his knee. "Nobody'd ever suspect me! Muzhiks don't go in for such things. Books are the business of the gentlefolk, and they're the ones to answer for them."

The mother felt that Pavel did not understand Rybin. She saw her son narrow his eyes, and that meant he was angry.

"Mikhailo Ivanovich wants to do the work himself, but have others take the blame," she explained timidly.

"That's it," said Rybin, stroking his beard. "For the present."

"Listen, mother," said Pavel dryly, "if one of our fellows, take Andrei, for instance, should hide behind my back while he did something, and then I was put in jail for it, how would you like it?"

The mother gave a little start and looked at her son in surprise.

"How could anybody play such a trick on a comrade?" she asked, shaking her head.

"Hm-m," drawled Rybin. "I see what you mean, Pavel." He gave the mother a supercilious wink. "This is a ticklish business, mother," he said, then, turning back to Pavel and assuming a didactic tone: "You think like a child, brother. Can't worry about being honest when you're doing secret work. Judge for yourself: the first person to get thrown in jail will be the fellow they find with the book, not the teachers at all. That's the first thing. Second: even if the teachers use only approved books, the idea they teach is the same. Only the words are different—less truthful. In a nutshell, they're for the same thing I am, but they take a by-path while I go marching down the main road. From the point of view of the bosses, we're both to blame, aren't we? Third: I don't give a hang for them, brother! You'll never get the infantry to make friends with the cavalry. Maybe I wouldn't ever do such a thing to a muzhik. But to them—one of them the son of a priest, the other the daughter of a rich landlord—why should they go stirring up the people? It's not for me, a muzhik, to read their minds. I know what I'm doing, but I haven't the least idea what they're after. For a thousand years the gentlefolk did what they were supposed to do: tanned the muzhiks' hide. Now all of a sudden they wake up and start taking the blinders off the muzhiks with their own hands! I'm not one to believe in fairy tales, and this is too much like a fairy tale. There's a lot of distance between me and the gentlefolk. Sometimes when you're riding across the fields in the winter you suddenly see something a long way ahead flash across the road. What is it? A wolf or a fox or just a dog? Can't tell. Too much distance between you."

The mother glanced at her son. He looked downcast.

Rybin's eyes shone with a dark light as he watched Pavel complacently and combed his beard with his fingers.

"No time to think about good manners," he continued. "Life's hard. A pack of dogs is not a flock of sheep—every dog barks in its own way."

"There are gentlefolk who go to their death for the sake of the common people," said the mother, thinking of familiar faces. "Who spend all their lives in jail."

"They're in a special class," answered Rybin. "Muzhiks get rich and climb up to the gentlefolk; gentlefolk get poor and climb down to the muzhiks. Remember how you explained it to me, Pavel? It's the way a person lives that decides what he thinks. That's the thing! If a worker says 'yes,' his boss says 'no'; if a worker says 'no,' his boss says 'yes.' That's their nature. Well, there's the same difference between the muzhik and the landlord. It'd turn a lord's stomach to see his muzhik get enough to eat. Of course every class has its own sons of bitches, and I'm not defending all muzhiks. . . ."

He rose to his feet, strong and lowering, his beard quivering as though he had noiselessly snapped his teeth together.

"For five years I shifted from factory to factory—forgot what the village was like," he resumed in a milder tone. "When I went back to the country at last, I knew I couldn't live like that any more! Understand? Just couldn't! Living here, you don't see the wrong going on out there. Out there hunger follows people like their own shadows, and no hope of getting food. None at all. Hunger swallows up people's souls and eats the human faces off them. They don't live; they just rot away in endless want. The officials watch them like hawks to make sure they don't pick up something extra. If they catch a muzhik with anything, they snatch it away and sock him in the jaw."

Rybin glanced about, then leaned across the table towards Pavel.

"Turned my stomach to be back in that life again. Thought I couldn't stand it. Then I said to myself: 'You've got to stick it out. You may not be able to give them bread, but you can cook up a good stew!' And there I stayed, my heart fairly bursting with the grudge I bore. And the grudge is still there, sticking in my heart like a dagger."

Slowly he went over to Pavel and placed his hand on his shoulder. The sweat stood out on his brow and his hand trembled.

"I need your help. Give me books, the kind that won't let a fellow sleep after he's read them. We want to plant a hedgehog under their skulls, with sharp bristles! Tell the people who write for you to write for the village too. Let them write so's the letters sizzle! So's the people will die for the cause!" He raised his arm and enunciated every word separately and distinctly. "Death will conquer death! In other words, die to resurrect the people! Let thousands of us die to resurrect millions of people all over the earth! That's what! Dying's easy for the sake of the resurrection! If only the people rise!"

The mother brought in the samovar and gave Rybin a sidelong glance. She felt crushed under the weight and force of his words. There was something about him that reminded her of her husband. Her husband had bared his teeth like that and had rolled up his sleeves in the same way. And he too had been filled with impatient wrath. Impatient, but inarticulate, whereas this man gave expression to his feelings. That made him less terrifying.

"We must do this," said Pavel with a shake of his head. "Give us the facts and we'll print a newspaper for you."

The mother looked at her son with a smile and shook her head. Then, without a word, she put on her things and left the house.

"Good! We'll give you the material! Write so simply that even the cows will understand!" cried Rybin.

The door of the kitchen was opened and someone came in.

"It's Yefim," said Rybin as he glanced into the kitchen. "Come here, Yefim! This is Pavel. I told you about him."

In front of Pavel stood a tall, fair-haired, broad-faced boy wearing a short sheepskin coat, holding his cap in his hands and glancing up at him from under lowered brows. He gave the impression of being very strong.

"Glad to meet you," he said huskily, and when he had shaken hands, ran his fingers through his straight hair. In glancing round the room, his eyes fell on the books, and he began to edge his way towards them.

"He's spotted them!" said Rybin with a wink to Pavel. Yefim glanced round, then began to examine the books.

"What a lot of books!" he exclaimed. "And you probably have no time to read them. If you lived in the village you'd have more time for that."

"But less desire?" inquired Pavel.

"Oh no, plenty of desire too," answered the boy, stroking his chin. "The people have begun to use their brains. 'Geology.' What's that?"

Pavel explained.

"We don't need that," said the boy, putting the book back on the shelf.

"The muzhik doesn't care where the earth came from," said Rybin with a loud sigh. "It's how it got parcelled out that interests him. How the landlords stole it from under his very nose. What difference does it make whether it moves or stands still? It can be hung up or nailed up for all the muzhik cares, so long as it feeds him."

"History of Slavery," read Yefim. "Is that about us?"

"No, but you'll find a chapter about Russian serfdom in this book," said Pavel, handing him a different volume. Yefim took it and turned it over in his hands.

"That's a thing of the past," he said indifferently, putting it down.

"Have you an allotment of land?" asked Pavel.

"Sure. Me and my two brothers have four dessiatins. All sand. Good for cleaning brass, but no good for farming." He paused for a moment. "But I've left the land. What's it good for? Doesn't feed you, just ties you down. I've been a farm labourer for four years. Have to do army service in the fall. Uncle Mikhailo says not to report. Says they send the soldiers to kill the people nowadays. But I think I'll go. The soldiers killed the people in the days of Stepan Razin and Pugachov too. It's time to put an end to that, don't you think so?" he asked, looking at Pavel.

"High time," answered Pavel with a smile. "But it's not easy. You have to know what to say to the soldiers and how to say it."

"We'll learn," said Yefim.

"If the officers find out, they may shoot you," said Pavel with a curious glance at Yefim.

"Can't expect much mercy from them," agreed the boy calmly, returning to his inspection of the books.

"Drink your tea, Yefim," said Rybin. "We've got to go soon."

"All right. Is a revolution a revolt?"

Andrei came in, red and steaming from his bath, a glum look on his face. He shook hands with Yefim without a word, sat down next to Rybin, looked him over, and gave a little snort.

"You don't look very cheerful. What's the trouble?" asked Rybin, slapping him on the knee.

"Nothing special," answered the *khokhol*.

"Is he a worker too?" asked Yefim, nodding towards Andrei.

"Yes," said Andrei. "What of it?"

"He's never seen a factory worker before," explained Rybin. "Finds they're not like other people."

"How are we different?" asked Pavel.

"You've got sharp bones," answered Yefim after a careful study of Andrei. "A muzhik's bones are rounded off."

"A muzhik stands steadier on his feet," added Rybin. "Feels the earth under him, even if it isn't his. He feels it, the earth. But a factory hand is like a bird: no native soil, no home—here today, gone tomorrow. Even a woman can't hold him to one spot. Soon as anything goes wrong, he leaves her. Goes off in search of something better. But the muzhik wants to make things better without cutting loose. Here's your mother back."

"Would you lend me one of your books?" asked Yefim, coming up to Pavel.

"Of course I will," said Pavel.

The boy's eyes lighted up eagerly.

"I'll bring it back," he hastened to assure Pavel. "Our fellows are always hauling tar here, and they'll bring it."

"Time to go," said Rybin, who had already slipped into his sheepskin and was pulling the belt tight.

"This'll be a treat for me!" exclaimed Yefim, holding up the book and smiling broadly.

When they had gone, Pavel turned excitedly to Andrei.

"What do you think of them?" he exclaimed.

"Hm-m-m," drawled the *khokhol*. "Like a couple of storm clouds."

"Mikhailo?" said the mother. "He looks as if he'd never worked at a factory. A real muzhik! And such a dreadful one!"

"Too bad you weren't here when they came," said Pavel to Andrei, who was sitting at the table frowning at his glass of tea. "You're always talking about the human heart; you should have had a peep into these two hearts. Rybin left me breathless; I couldn't even argue with him. He has almost no faith in human beings and sets no value on them. Mother was right—there's something dreadful about him."

"I could see that," replied the *khokhol* morosely. "The rulers have poisoned the minds of men. When the masses rise up, they'll knock down everything. They want bare land; if it isn't bare, they'll make it so. They'll tear down everything."

He spoke slowly, and it was clear that his mind was occupied with something else. The mother reached out and touched him gently.

"Pull yourself together, Andryusha," she said.

"Wait a bit, *nenko,*" he replied with quiet tenderness. Suddenly he flared up and struck the table with his hand. "It's true, Pavel! The muzhik will strip the land for his own use once he gets on his feet! He'll burn up everything, like after the plague, removing all traces of the hurt he's suffered."

"And then he'll stand in our way," observed Pavel softly.

"It's up to us not to allow him to. It's up to us to rein him in. We're closer to him than anybody else. He'll trust us and follow us."

"Rybin has asked us to publish a newspaper for the village," said Pavel.

"Just the thing!"

"Too bad I didn't argue with him," said Pavel with a short laugh.

"There's still time for it," said the *khokhol* calmly, running his fingers through his hair. "Go on piping, and those whose feet are not rooted in the earth will dance to your tune. Rybin was right when he said we don't feel the earth under our feet, and we oughtn't to, because it's our job to give it a good shaking up. We'll shake it once and people will be torn loose; we'll shake it again—and they'll be free."

"Everything looks so simple to you, Andryusha," said the mother with a laugh.

"It is," said the *khokhol*. "As simple as life itself."

In a few minutes he said, "I'm going out for a walk in the fields."

"After your bath? It's windy, you'll catch cold," warned the mother.

"I need an airing," he replied.

"Don't catch cold," said Pavel affectionately. "Perhaps you'd better take a nap."

"No, I'm going."

He put on his things and went out without a word.

"He feels wretched," observed the mother with a sigh.

"You seem to have grown even fonder of him since that happened," said Pavel, "and I'm glad."

She looked at him in surprise.

"Have I? I didn't notice. I love him more than I can say."

"You have a kind heart, mother," said Pavel softly.

"If I could only be the least help to you and your friends! If only I knew how!"

"You'll learn."

"I need to learn how to stop worrying," she said with a little laugh.

"We'd better not talk about this any more, Mummy. But remember one thing—I'm very, very grateful to you!"

She went into the kitchen so that he should not see her tears.

It was late when the *khokhol* came home, and he went straight to bed.

"I must have walked ten versts," he said.

"Did it help?" asked Pavel.

"Let's not talk about it. I'm going to sleep."

And he did not say another word.

In a little while Vesovshchikov dropped in, as ragged and dirty and discontented as ever.

"Have you heard who killed Isai?" he asked Pavel as he walked clumsily up and down.

"No," said Pavel curtly.

"They found somebody who wasn't too squeamish for the job. I myself was getting ready to knock him off. Too bad it wasn't me; I was just the fellow for it."

"Don't say such things, Nikolai," said Pavel in a friendly tone.

"The very idea!" exclaimed the mother affectionately. "Roaring like a lion when you have the heart of a lamb! Why should you?"

She was glad to see Nikolai tonight. Even his pockmarked face seemed more attractive.

"I'm only good for such business," said Nikolai with a shrug of his shoulders. "I keep wondering what I can do. Nothing. You've got to talk to people, and I don't know how. I see how things are, how people are wronged, but I can't put it in words. I'm like a dumb brute."

Crossing over to Pavel, he dropped his eyes and stood digging at the table as he said in a voice that was childishly plaintive, not at all like his usual one, "Give me a hard job to do, chums. I can't go on living like this. You're all wrapped up in your work and I can see how it's growing, and me out of it all. Just hauling logs and boards. A fellow has nothing to live for. Do give me a hard job."

Pavel reached for his hand and drew him over.

"We will," he said.

From behind the partition came the voice of the *khokhol.*

"I'll teach you to be our typesetter, Nikolai. How would you like that?"

Nikolai went in to him.

"If you do I'll—I'll give you my knife!" he said.

"To hell with your knife!" shouted the *khokhol* in a burst of laughter.

"It's a good knife," insisted Nikolai.

Pavel also began to laugh.

"Laughing at me?" asked Nikolai, halting in the middle of the room.

"Of course," said the *khokhol*, jumping out of bed. "Listen, let's go for a walk in the fields; there's a moon tonight. Shall we?"

"All right," said Pavel.

"I'll come too," said Nikolai. "I like to hear the *khokhol* laugh."

"And I like to have you promise me presents," said the *khokhol* with a chuckle.

He went into the kitchen to get dressed.

"Put on some warm clothes," urged the mother.

When the three had left, she watched them through the window for a while, then turned to the icon.

"Dear God, be good to them; help them!" she murmured.

XXVI

The days sped past so quickly that the mother had no time to think about the approach of May Day. But at night, when she lay in bed worn out by the noisy bustle of the day, she felt a dull ache in her heart.

"If only it would come soon!" she would think.

The whistle blew at dawn, and, after a hurried breakfast, her son and Andrei would go out, leaving her with a dozen tasks to do for them. All day long she would rush about like a squirrel in a cage, getting dinner, making paste and purple ink for their posters, talking to the unknown people who would appear mysteriously, hand her messages for Pavel, and disappear just as mysteriously, imparting to her some of their own excitement.

Almost every night appeals to the workers to take part in the May Day celebration were posted on fences and even on the doors of the police station; and every day leaflets were found at the factory. In the morning policemen would walk through the workers' settlement, cursing as they tore and scraped them off. But at dinnertime new leaflets were blown by the wind under the feet of passers-by. Detectives were sent out from town and took up their stand on the street corners, searching the faces of the workers who gaily went to and from the factory during the dinner hour. Everyone enjoyed seeing the inability of the police to cope with the situation. Even the older workers smiled.

"Just look what they're doing!" they would say.

Groups of workers could be seen everywhere heatedly discussing the appeal. There was a great deal of excitement, and everyone found life more interesting that spring because there was something new in it. Some people were angrier than ever and cursed the rebels roundly. Others felt a vague hope and alarm. Still others, and they were the minority, had the keen pleasure of knowing that they were the ones who had stirred up the people.

Pavel and Andrei got almost no sleep. Pale, hoarse, exhausted, they would come home at dawn. The mother knew they were holding meetings in the woods. She also knew that mounted police patrolled the country around the settlement at night, and that detectives were everywhere, seizing and searching some of the workers, breaking up any groups of people they came upon, sometimes making arrests. She realized that her son and Andrei were in constant danger of being arrested, and she almost wanted them to be, thinking it would be better for them.

For some strange reason the murder of the timekeeper was hushed up. For two days the local police carried on an investigation, but after questioning some dozen people, they dropped the case.

One day Maria Korsunova, who was on as good terms with the police as with everyone else, told the mother her opinion, which was undoubtedly that of the police.

"A fat chance of finding the murderer!" she said. "A hundred people must have seen Isai that morning, and a good ninety of them would have been only too glad to do away with him. For seven years he's been tempting folks."

The *khokhol* changed noticeably. His face grew thin and drawn and his eyelids swelled, half-closing his prominent eyes. Thin lines could be traced from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. He spoke less of ordinary things, but more and more often he had moments of transport, when he would thrill his listeners with his vision of a future in which reason and freedom would be triumphant.

The talk about Isai's murder soon died down.

"They don't give a damn for the people, not even for the ones they use against us," Andrei said with a wry smile. "And they don't regret the loss of their hirelings. Only of their money."

"Enough of such talk, Andrei!" said Pavel firmly.

"The rot crumbled at the first touch, that's all," said the mother.

"True enough, but it's not much comfort," replied the *khokhol* gloomily.

He often said this, and when he said it, the words broadened into a generalization which was caustic and bitter.

At last the long-awaited day arrived: the First of May.

The whistle blew as peremptorily as ever. The mother, who had not closed her eyes all night, jumped out of bed and lighted the samovar, which she had made ready in the evening. She was about to knock at the door of the boys' room as usual, but she thought better of it, and sat down at the window, holding one hand to her face as if she had a toothache.

Across the pale blue sky floated a cluster of pink and white clouds like a flock of large birds frightened by the hissing of the steam from the factory. The mother watched the clouds dreamily. Her head was heavy and her eyes were dry and inflamed from her sleepless night. She was filled with a strange calmness. Her heart beat evenly and her mind was busy with simple thoughts. "I lighted the samovar too soon; the water will all boil away. . . . They're both so worn out, let them sleep a bit longer this morning. . . ."

A ray of early sun glanced merrily in at the window. She held out her hand, and when the bright warmth came to rest on it, she stroked it with her other hand smiling meditatively. At last she got up and quietly took the pipe out of the samovar. Then she washed herself and began to pray, crossing herself fervently and silently moving her lips. Her face grew brighter and her right eyebrow began to quiver.

The second whistle was not so loud and imperious; there was a slight tremor in its thick moist tone, and the mother imagined it blew longer than usual.

From the other room came the *khokhol's* deep, clear voice.

"Hear that, Pavel?"

Someone's bare feet slapped down on to the floor, and one of the boys gave a luxurious yawn.

"The samovar's ready," cried the mother.

"We're getting up," replied Pavel merrily.

"The sun's rising," said the *khokhol*. "And there are clouds in the sky. We could do without the clouds today."

He entered the kitchen rumpled and wrinkled with sleep, but in the best of moods.

"Morning, *nenko*! How did you sleep?"

The mother went over to him.

"You march alongside of him, Andryusha," she said softly.

"I will," whispered the *khokhol*. "You can be sure, *nenko*, that as long as we're together, we'll always march beside each other!"

"What are you two whispering about?" asked Pavel.

"Nothing special, Pasha."

"She's telling me to wash behind my ears! The girls'll be ogling me today!" answered the *khokhol* going out into the entrance to wash.

"'Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!'" sang Pavel softly.

The weather improved as the day advanced, and the clouds were driven away by the wind. The mother shook her head as she set the breakfast table, thinking to herself how strange it all was: here they were laughing and cracking jokes this morning, while nobody knew what awaited them later in the day. And somehow she herself felt calm and almost joyful.

They dawdled with the meal, to make the time pass quicker. Pavel stirred the sugar in his glass with his usual slow care and sprinkled salt evenly over his bread—the crust, which he always preferred. The *khokhol* shifted his feet under the table (he never could find a comfortable position for his feet) and watched a sunbeam refracted by the tea dance over wall and ceiling.

"When I was about ten years old, I thought I'd catch the sun in a glass," he said. "So I took a glass, sneaked up on a spot of sun, and—bang with the glass! I cut my hand and got a good beating besides. After the beating I went out in the garden, and when I saw the sun reflected in a puddle, I stamped on it for all I was worth. My clothes got splashed, and I was given another beating. So I took revenge by sticking out my tongue at the sun and shouting, 'It didn't hurt, you redheaded devil! It didn't hurt!' Somehow that made me feel better."

"What made you call it redheaded?" laughed Pavel.

"Across the street from us lived a big redfaced smith with a red beard. He was a jolly, kindhearted fellow, and it seemed to me the sun was like him."

When the mother could stand it no longer, she said, "Why don't you talk about how you're going to march today?"

"It would just mix things up to talk about what's already been decided," said the *khokhol* gently. "If by any chance they arrest us all, *nenko*, Nikolai Ivanovich will come and tell you what to do."

"Very well," said the mother with a sigh.

"What if we went for a walk?" said Pavel dreamily.

"Better stay home for the present," answered Andrei. "Why tantalize the police ahead of time? They know you well enough as it is."

Feodor Mazin came running in, his face shining, his cheeks flaming. His joyous excitement broke the strain of their waiting.

"Things have started!" he said. "The people are stirring! Coming out into the street with set faces. Vesovshchikov and Vasya Gusev and Samoilov are standing at the factory gates making speeches. Lots of the workers have turned back home. Come on! It's time to go! Ten o'clock already!"

"I'm coming," said Pavel decisively.

"You'll see, after dinner the whole factory'll turn out!" cried Feodor as he ran off.

"He's burning up like a candle in the wind," said the mother. Then she got up and went out into the kitchen to change her clothes.

"Where are you going, *nenko*?"

"Along with you," she answered.

Andrei pulled at his moustache and glanced at Pavel. Pavel ran his fingers through his hair and went out to her.

"I won't say a word to stop you, mother, and—don't you say anything to me—all right?"

"All right, all right. May the Lord bless you," she muttered.

XXVII

When she found herself outside and heard the excited, expectant hum of voices in the air, and when she saw the groups of people standing at the gates and in the windows of the houses curiously watching her son and Andrei, everything swam before her eyes in a hazy mixture of green and grey.

The people exchanged greetings with them, and today there was special significance in their words. She caught snatches of remarks passed in quiet voices:

"There they go, the leaders."

"We don't know who the leaders are."

"I didn't mean any harm."

From a courtyard someone shouted crossly:

"The police'll catch 'em and that'll be the end of 'em."

"They caught them once!"

A woman's wail leaped out of a window down into the street: "Mind what you're doing! Remember, you've got a family to take care of!"

They passed the house of the legless Zosimov, who received a monthly pension from the factory for having been crippled at work.

"Pavel!" he cried, sticking his head out of the window. "They'll break your neck for you, you scoundrel! You'll get what's coming to you!"

The mother shuddered and stood still. A stab of anger shot through her. She glanced up into the bloated face of the cripple, and he drew in his head with an oath. She quickened her steps until she caught up with her son and followed at his heels, trying not to lag behind.

It seemed as though Pavel and Andrei took no notice of anything and were unconscious of the remarks made as they passed. They walked on calmly and unhurriedly. Once they were stopped by Mironov, a modest, middle-aged man whom everyone respected for his sober, upright way of living.

"So you too decided not to go to work today, Danilo Ivanovich?" said Pavel.

"My wife's about to have a baby. And besides, a day like this makes you feel restless." He gazed steadily at his comrades as he asked in lowered tones, "They say you fellows are planning to make trouble for the director today—smash some windows, eh?"

"We're not drunk!" exclaimed Pavel.

"We simply mean to march down the street with our flags and sing some songs," said the *khokhol*. "Listen to our songs; they are our profession of faith."

"I know your faith all right," said Mironov thoughtfully, "I read your papers. Ah, Pelagea Nilovna," he cried, smiling at the mother with his intelligent eyes. "You joining the revolt?"

"Have to march along with justice once before I die!"

"Well, well!" said Mironov. "Looks as if they were right in saying it was you brought the forbidden leaflets into the factory!"

"Who said that?" asked Pavel.

"Hm-m. That's what they said. Well, good-bye. Keep yourselves in hand."

The mother smiled quietly. She was glad they said such things of her.

"You'll land in jail yet, mother," said Pavel with a laugh.

The sun kept climbing higher, pouring its warmth into the crisp freshness of the spring day. The movement of the clouds slowed down and their shadows grew lighter and more transparent. They slid gently over the street and the housetops, shading the people and cleansing the settlement, wiping the dust and dirt off the houses, the boredom off the faces of the people. Everything looked more cheerful. The sound of voices increased until it drowned out the distant hum of machines.

Once more words came flying and crawling to the mother's ears from windows and courtyards—words that were vicious and alarming, thoughtful and cheering. But now she was eager to contradict, explain, express her gratitude—to take an active part in the strangely variegated life of that day.

A crowd of some hundred people had gathered in a narrow by-street, and from the midst of them came the voice of Vesovshchikov.

"They squeeze the blood out of us like the juice out of a cranberry." His clumsy words fell heavily on the heads of the people.

"Don't they just!" boomed several voices at once.

"The boy's making an effort," said the *khokhol*. "Think I'll go and help him."

And before Pavel had a chance to stop him he had twisted his long, supple body into the crowd like a screw into a cork.

"Comrades!" he cried in his rich voice. "They say that different peoples inhabit the earth—Jews and Germans, Englishmen and Tatars. But I don't believe it. There are only two peoples—two incompatible peoples—the rich and the poor. People dress differently and talk differently, but when you see how the rich Frenchmen, Germans, and Englishmen treat the working people, you realize that for us workers all of them are rapscallions, damn their hides!"

Somebody in the crowd laughed.

"And on the other hand, if you take a close look you'll see that the French and the Tatar and the Turkish workers all live the same dog's life that we Russian workers live!"

More and more people kept turning into the by-street, craning their necks and stretching up on their toes without saying a word.

Andrei's voice grew louder.

"The workers abroad have already grasped that simple truth, and today, on May Day. . . ."

"The police!" cried somebody.

Four mounted policemen rode straight into the by-street, lashing out with their whips and shouting:

"Break it up!"

The people frowned and retreated unwillingly. A few of them climbed up on the fences.

"They think they're brave soldiers, but they're just pigs!" shouted someone brazenly.

The *khokhol* stayed where he was in the middle of the street, and two horses made for him, tossing their heads. He stepped to one side, and at that moment the mother seized his hand and pulled him after her.

"You promised to stay near Pavel," she wailed, "and here you are looking for trouble all by yourself."

"A thousand pardons," said the *khokhol* with a smile.

Pelagea felt a racking, ominous weariness which rose from deep down within her and made her giddy, bringing a strange alternation of joy and sorrow. She longed to have the dinner whistle blow.

They came to the church on the square. About five hundred noisy young people and children were gathered in the churchyard. The crowd surged back and forth. People raised their heads and looked into the distance, impatiently waiting for something. The air was charged with excitement. Some people seemed not to know what to do, others assumed a show of bravado. Women's soft voices pleaded with the men, who turned away from them in annoyance. Sometimes low oaths could be heard. From the mixed crowd rose a dull rumble of hostility.

"Mitenka!" said a woman in a trembling voice. "Take pity on yourself!"

"Leave me alone!" came the answer.

The imposing voice of Sizov sounded calm and convincing.

"We mustn't leave the young folks in the lurch," he said. "They've got more sense than we have, and more courage. Who was it stood up for our swamp kopeks? It was them, and we mustn't forget it. They were thrown in jail for it, and we got the benefit."

The whistle blew, swallowing up the voices of the people in a black rush of sound. A shudder passed over the crowd. Those who were sitting down stood up, and for a moment everyone was hushed and on his guard, the faces of many even paling.

"Comrades!" came the strong, rich voice of Pavel. The mother's eyes were stung by hot tears, and she felt an upsurge of strength. With a single quick movement she took up her stand behind her son, about whom people were clustered like bits of steel about a magnet.

The mother looked into his face, seeing only his proud, brave, burning eyes.

"Comrades! We decided that today we would make an open declaration of who we are and raise our banner, the banner of reason, justice, and freedom!"

A long white staff flashed in the air, then dipped into the crowd, bisecting it, hidden by it, until a moment later the banner of the working class rose above the lifted faces like a huge red bird.

Pavel lifted his arm and the banner wavered; a dozen hands grasped the smooth white wood of the flagstaff, and among them was the hand of the mother.

"Long live the working class!" cried Pavel.

Hundreds of voices roared back in response.

"Long live the Social-Democratic Workers' Party—our party, comrades—the well-spring of our ideas!"

The crowd seethed. Those who knew the significance of the banner pressed towards it; Mazin, Samoilov, and the Gusevs reached Pavel; Nikolai, with lowered head, pushed his way through the throng, and the mother felt herself being thrust aside by other bright-eyed young people whom she did not know.

"Long live the workers of the world!" cried Pavel.

He was answered by a soul-stirring cry coming from a thousand throats in a crescendo of joy and strength.

The mother grasped the hand of Nikolai and of somebody else; she was choking with tears, but she did not cry. Her knees trembled, and she murmured through quivering lips:

"You dears!"

A broad smile spread over Nikolai's pock-marked face. He muttered something as he gazed at the banner and stretched out his hand towards it. Suddenly he threw an arm about the mother's neck and kissed her, laughing as he did so.

"Comrades!" said the *khokhol*, his mellow voice rising above the murmur of the crowd. "We have launched a crusade in the name of a new god, the god of light and reason, of goodness and truth. Our goal is far away, but our crown of thorns is close at hand. If anyone lacks faith in the triumph of truth, if anyone lacks the courage to give his life for this truth, if anyone doubts his own strength and is afraid to suffer, let him stay behind. We only want those who believe in our victory! Those who don't see our goal mustn't march with us, for they will only come to grief. Join the ranks, comrades! Long live the holiday of free people! Long live May Day!"

The crowd grew. Pavel lifted the banner and it unfolded in the air as he carried it forward, lighted by sun, smiling its broad, bright smile.

Feodor Mazin began to sing:

Renouncing forever the old world....

Dozens of other voices rose in a soft strong wave to join him:

We shake off its dust from our feet! . . .

The mother walked behind Mazin, a radiant smile on her lips, her eyes straining above Feodor's head towards the banner and her son. All about her were joyful faces and eyes of many colours, while in front marched her son and Andrei. She could hear both of them singing, Andrei's sonorous tenor merging with Pavel's deep bass:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!
Arise, all who labour and hunger!

People came running towards the red banner. They shouted as they ran, but their shouts were drowned by the sounds of the song—that same song which had been sung softer than others at home. Here in the street it rang out unrestrained and with an awful force. It resounded with indomitable courage, and while it challenged people to take the long path leading to the future, it frankly told them how difficult that path would be. Its steady flame consumed the dark slag of all that had outlived its time, all the refuse of traditional emotions, reducing the fear of the new to ashes.

A frightened, happy face bobbed beside the mother, and a whimpering voice said, "Mitya! Where are you going?"

"Let him go," said the mother without stopping. "Don't worry about him. I was scared myself at first. My son's in front—the one with the banner."

"Where are you going, you fools? The soldiers are up there!"

The woman, who was tall and skinny, suddenly clutched the mother with a bony hand.

"Listen to them singing, dear!" she cried. "And my Mitya too!"

"Don't be afraid," urged the mother. "Theirs is a sacred cause. Just think—there wouldn't have been a Christ either if people hadn't died for Him."

This thought suddenly flashed through her mind and overwhelmed her with its simple, clear truth. She glanced into the face of the woman, who was still clutching her hand.

"There wouldn't ever have been a Christ if people hadn't died for Him—for the Lord," she repeated with a surprised smile.

Sizov came up beside her.

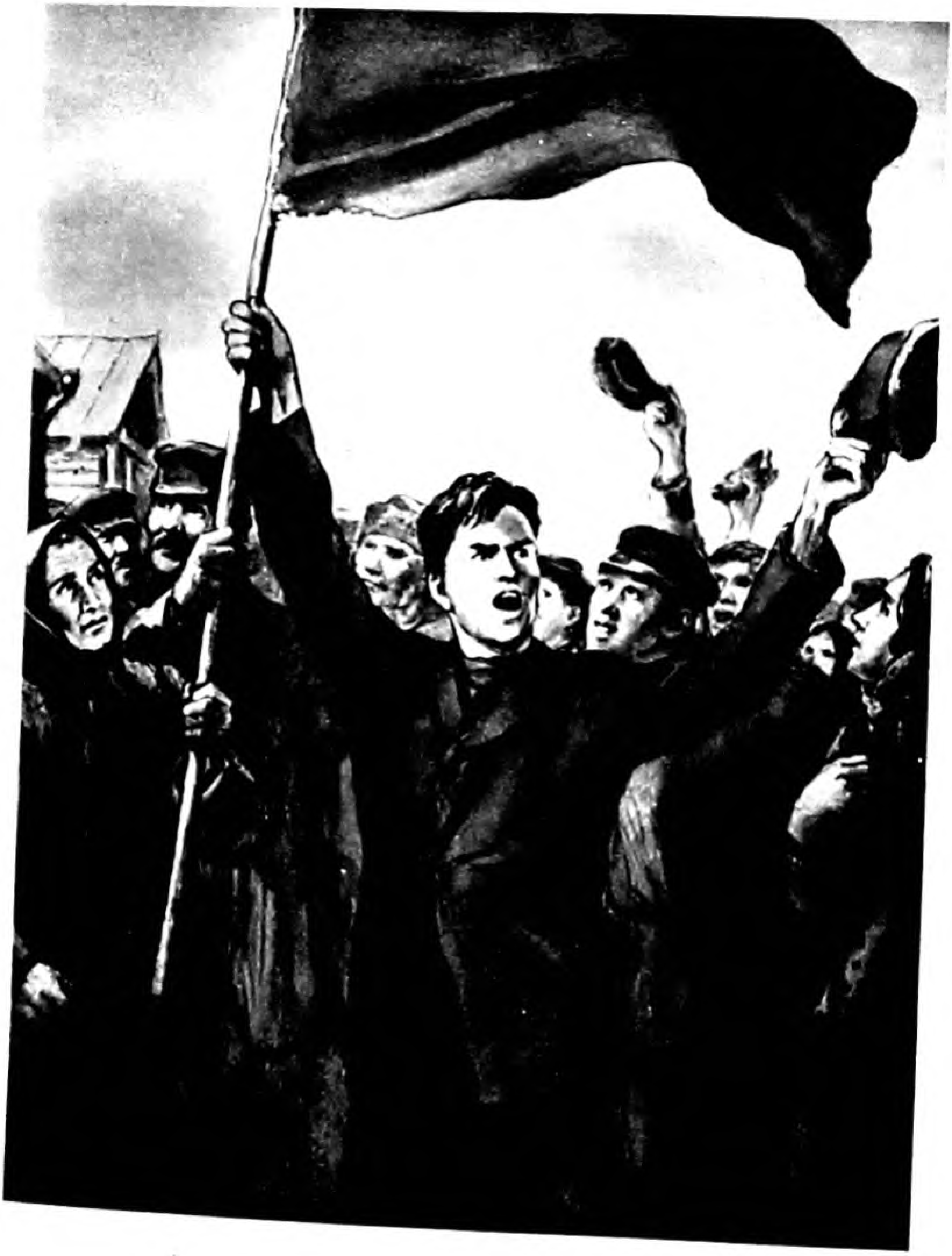
"Marching out openly today, eh?" he said, taking off his cap and waving it in time to the song. "Singing a song. And what a song, mother, eh?"

The tsar needs soldiers to send to the war,
So hand him over your sons. . . .

"They aren't afraid of anything," said Sizov. "And my poor lad in his grave. . . ."

The mother's heart was pounding so that she had to fall behind. She was quickly thrust aside and pushed against a fence, while the people rolled past her in a vast wave. There were very many of them, and this made her happy.

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise. . . .



It seemed as though a great brass horn were pouring the song into the air, awakening the people, arousing in some a readiness to fight, in others a burning curiosity, a vague sense of happiness, of something new; here it gave rise to timid hopes; there it opened the floodgates of a long-accumulating anger. Everyone looked ahead to where the red banner was waving in the breeze.

"There they go!" roared someone ecstatically. "Good for you, fellows!"

And because the person was filled with something too great to be expressed in ordinary words, he let out a mighty oath. But malice, the dark, blind malice of a slave, hissed like a snake on which a ray of sunshine has fallen, and found expression in malignant words:

"The heretics!" croaked one man who shook his fist out of a window.

"Rising against His Majesty the Emperor, against His Majesty the Tsar! A revolt!" came the whining voice of another.

She caught glimpses of perturbed faces as the men and women teemed past. The throng kept pouring on and on like lava, drawn ever forward by the song, which seemed to sweep everything before it, clearing the road by the sheer force of its impact. As she looked at the red banner far up ahead, she saw the face of her son in her mind's eye—his bronze brow, and his eyes shining with the light of faith.

Now she found herself at the end of the procession, among people who walked unhurriedly, glancing about with the cold indifference of observers who already know how the play will end. They spoke in matter-of-fact voices and with utter conviction.

"There's one company stationed at the school and another at the factory."

"The governor's come."

"Really?"

"Saw him with my own eyes. Just arrived."

"At last they're scared of us—just think, soldiers and the governor!" The speaker swore with gratification.

"Ah, you good souls," thought the mother.

But the words she heard sounded cold and dead. She quickened her steps so as to get away from these people; it was easy to pass them, they walked so slowly and lazily.

Suddenly the head of the procession seemed to smash into something and the body reared back with a frightened roar. The song also shuddered, only to be taken up again, louder and in quicker rhythm than before. But again it subsided. One by one the people stopped singing. Separate voices could be heard trying to lift the song to its former glory:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!
Arise, all who labour and hunger. . . .

But in this effort there was no longer the common will, the cemented faith. Alarm now sounded in the voices.

Since the mother could not see the front ranks and did not know what had happened, she began pushing the marchers aside and forcing her way ahead. As she advanced, she kept bumping into people who were retreating, some of them frowning, with drooping heads, others smiling in discomfiture, still others whistling ironically. She searched their faces, her eyes filled with inquiry, pleading, appeal. . . .

"Comrades!" came the voice of Pavel. "Soldiers are the same sort of people we are! They won't touch us. Why should they? Just because we proclaim a truth everyone should know? They ought to hear it too. They don't realize it yet, but the time will soon come when they'll join our ranks under the banner of freedom instead of opposing us under the banner of murder and robbery. And to hasten their understanding of the truth, we must keep on marching ahead. Forward, comrades! Ever forward!"

Pavel's voice sounded firm. His words rang out sharp and clear, but the crowd was breaking up. One after another the people dropped out of line, going off to the houses and leaning against the fences. The procession had now assumed the form of a wedge, with Pavel at the head, the workers' red banner waving brightly above him. Or perhaps the procession more nearly resembled a dark bird with widespread wings ready to take to flight, with Pavel the beak of this bird.

XXVIII

At the end of the street the mother saw a grey wall of faceless people, all of them alike, cutting off the entrance to the square. From the shoulder of each came the cold glitter of a bayonet. And from that silent, motionless wall came an icy breath that enveloped the workers and chilled the mother's heart.

She pushed her way through the crowd, trying to reach the spot where the people she knew were gathered round the banner along with people she did not know, from whom her friends seemed to seek support. She was pressed tight against a tall, clean-shaven man with only one eye, who had to turn his head half-way round to look at her.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Pavel Vlassov's mother," she said, conscious that her knees were shaking and that she was unable to control her lower lip.

"Oh!" said the one-eyed man.

"Comrades!" said Pavel. "All our lives we must keep pressing forward. There is no other direction for us!"

The people grew quiet and expectant. The banner was raised, wavered for a second, then floated out over the heads of the people as it was carried steadily toward the grey wall of soldiers. The mother shuddered and closed her eyes with a gasp: four people—Pavel, Andrei, Samoilov and Mazin—had gone up ahead of the crowd.

Through the air came the clear voice of Feodor Mazin:

You fell, a noble sacrifice. . . .

And like a deep sigh came the response in lowered voices:

In this unequal fight. . . .

The four moved forward in time to the music.

Feodor's voice rolled out like a bright ribbon, full of resolution and proclaiming this resolution:

You gave all that you had. . . .

while his comrades joined him in the second line:

For freedom's cause. . . .

"Aha!" gloated someone off to one side. "Singing a dirge, the sons of bitches!"

"Sock him one!" cried an angry voice.

The mother pressed her hands to her breast and glanced round. She saw that the crowd which had flooded the entire street was wavering as it watched the four men advance with the banner. A few dozen of the marchers followed them, but with every step someone else dropped out, as though the pavement were burning the soles of their feet.

An end will come to violence. . . .

sang Feodor prophetically.

The people will arise. . . .

was the sure warning sung in response by a chorus of strong voices.

But awed whispers mingled with the singing:

"They're about to give the command!"

And sure enough, from up ahead came a sharp cry:

"Lower guns!"

In a wavy line the bayonets were lowered until they greeted the advancing banner with a cunning steel grin.

"Forward march!"

"Here they come!" said the one-eyed man, thrusting his hands into his pockets and striding off to one side.

The mother watched without the flicker of an eyelash. The soldiers surged across the entire width of the street in a grey wave that advanced with cold persistence and was capped by the silvery gleam of the bayonets. With a few quick steps she came closer to her son and saw that Andrei had stepped in front of him to protect him with his tall body.

"Return to your place, comrade!" called Pavel sharply.

Andrei was singing with his head thrown back, his hands behind his back. Pavel shouldered him away and once more cried:

"Get back! You have no right to do that! The banner must go first!"

"Disperse!" commanded a little officer in a thin voice as he flourished his sword. He raised his legs high as he marched, without bending the knees, and slapped the earth hard with the soles of his boots. The mother was aware of the shine of these boots.

A tall man with close-cropped hair and a thick grey moustache walked beside him and a little behind. He was wearing a long grey coat with a red lining, and a wide yellow stripe extended down his trouser legs. Like the *khokhol,* he walked with his hands behind his back. His eyes, with bushy eyebrows upraised, were fixed on Pavel.

The mother's gaze could not embrace all that she saw. Her breast was full of a loud cry which threatened to burst forth at every breath; she was suffocated by the cry, but she clutched her breast and held it back. People pushed her, and she swayed on her feet as she pressed forward unthinking, almost unconscious. She sensed that the crowd behind her was thinning as the cold wave advanced to meet it.

Smaller and smaller grew the space separating the people with the red banner and the solid wave of grey people. Now she could see the collective face of the soldiers—a distorted face smashed into a dirty-yellow line unevenly dotted with varicoloured eyes stretching all across the street. In front of it glittered cruel points of steel levelled at the breasts of the marchers, and without touching them, the steel cut them away, one after another, dispersing the crowd.

The mother heard people running behind her, and agitated voices crying:

"Scatter, fellows!"

"Run, Vlassov!"

"Get back, Pavel!"

"Drop the banner, Pavel!" said Vesovshchikov sullenly. "Give it to me, I'll hide it."

He seized the staff and the banner swung back.

"Let go!" cried Pavel.

Nikolai snatched his hand away as if he had burnt it. The song died. The people came to a halt and formed a solid wall around Pavel, but still he pushed ahead. Suddenly and unexpectedly there was a silence which seemed to have dropped from above, enveloping everyone in an invisible cloud.

Some twenty people surrounded the banner—not more—but they stood their ground firmly. The mother was drawn to them by her anxiety, and by a vague desire to tell them something.

"Take that thing away from him, lieutenant," said the tall old man, pointing to the banner.

The little officer ran over to Pavel and seized the flag.

"Let go!" he shrieked.

"Take your hands off!" said Pavel in a loud voice.

The banner shook in the air, dipping to right and to left, then again stood upright. The little officer jumped back and fell down. Nikolai rushed past the mother shaking his fist.

"Arrest them!" shouted the old man with a stamp of his foot.

Several soldiers ran forward. One of them swung the butt of his gun. The banner shuddered, fell forward and disappeared in the grey mass of soldiers.

"Oh dear!" cried someone bitterly.

The mother wailed like a wounded beast. In reply came the clear voice of Pavel from among the soldiers:

"Good-bye, mother! Good-bye, dearest!"

Two thoughts struck her: "He's alive! He remembered me!"

"Good-bye, *nenko*!"

She strained up on her toes to get a glimpse of them. There above the heads of the soldiers she saw the face of Andrei. He was smiling and bowing to her.

"Ah, dear hearts . . . Andryusha! Pasha!" she cried.

"Good-bye, comrades!" they called from the midst of the soldiers.

The shreds of an echo, many-voiced, answered them. It came from the windows, from somewhere up above, from the very roofs.

XXIX

Somebody struck her in the chest. Dimly she perceived the strained red face of a little officer standing in front of her.

"Get along with you, woman!" he shouted.

She swept him with a glance. At his feet she caught sight of the flagstaff broken in two, a bit of red cloth still fastened to one end. She stooped and picked it up. The officer snatched it out of her hand and pushed her aside.

"Move on, I tell you!" he shouted, stamping his foot.

From inside the ring of soldiers rose a song:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise! . . .

Everything reeled and swam and quivered. The air was filled with a menacing noise, like the hum of telegraph wires. The officer rushed over.

"Stop your singing!" he squealed in fury. "Sergeant-Major Krainov. . . ."

Unsteadily the mother went over to where he had dropped the broken flagstaff and picked it up.

"Shut their blasted mouths for them!"

The song struggled, trembled, broke off and was over. Someone put a hand on the mother's shoulder, turned her round, and gave her a push.

"Get along, get along," he said.

"Clear the street!" shouted the officer.

The mother saw another crowd of people a few steps away. They were shouting and cursing and whistling as they slowly backed down the street and disappeared in the yards of the houses.

"Move on, you she-devil!" shouted a young soldier in the mother's very ear, pushing her up on to the sidewalk.

She walked away, leaning heavily on the flagstaff, for all the strength had gone out of her. With her other hand she held on to walls and fences to keep herself from falling. The people kept backing away from her, while behind and beside her walked the soldiers, shouting:

"Get along, get along!"

She let them pass, then she stopped and looked round. At the end of the street she saw more soldiers blocking the entrance into the square, which was empty. The grey figures ahead of her kept pressing back the people.

She longed to retreat, but involuntarily she went forward until she came to a narrow empty by-street, into which she turned.

Again she stopped. She gave a deep sigh and listened. From somewhere in front came the murmur of the crowd.

Leaning heavily on the staff, she set out once more, now all in a sweat, her brows quivering, her lips moving, her hand gesticulating as disconnected words flashed through her mind like sparks, growing in volume until they burst into the flame of a vast desire to give them utterance, to cry them aloud!

The by-street made a sudden turn to the left, and here the mother caught sight of a large group of people.

"You don't brave a line of bayonets just for the fun of it, brothers!" said someone in a loud, strong voice.

"Did you ever see anything like it? The way they stood their ground with those bayonets coming at them! As firm as a rock, and not a bit scared!"

"That's Pavel Vlassov for you!"

"And the *khokhol?*"

"Hands behind his back and grinning all the while, the fearless devil!"

"Friends!" cried the mother, pushing her way into their midst. They made way for her respectfully. Somebody laughed.

"Look, she's got the flag! The flag's in her hands!"

"Shut up!" said a stern voice.

The mother held out her arms.

"Listen—in the name of the Lord! All you good people, all you dear people, do not be afraid to look at what has happened. Our own children, blood of our blood, have gone forth into the world in the name of justice for all! They have taken up this cross in search of a brighter day for all of you, and for your unborn children. It's another life they want—a life of truth and justice. It's goodness they want, for all people!"

Her heart was bursting and her throat was hot and dry. Deep within her, great new words were being born—words of all-embracing love which seared her tongue and forced it to speak fluently and forcefully.

She could see that everyone was listening to her in silence, and she felt they were thinking. Within her grew the desire, now clearly apprehended, to urge them to follow her son and Andrei and all those whom they had allowed to fall into the hands of the soldiers, all those whom they had abandoned to their fate.

With a glance at the frowning, attentive faces about her, she went on with gentle insistence:

"Our children have gone forth into the world to seek for joy, and they have done it for all our sakes and for the sake of Christ's truth. They have gone forth to fight everything which bad people, false and greedy people, have used to bind us with, to gag us with, to crush us with. Dear people, it's for all our sakes that the young ones have risen up—for the sake of the whole world—for the sake of working people wherever they are. Don't leave them, don't turn your backs on them, don't force your children to go on alone! Think of yourselves! Have faith in the hearts of your children, who have declared the truth, and are suffering for it. Have faith in them!"

Her voice broke, and she swayed, on the verge of fainting. Someone caught her up.

"It's God's truth she's speaking!" cried an agitated voice. "God's truth, good people! Listen!"

"See how she's torturing herself!" said another sympathetically.

"It's not herself she's torturing, it's us fools she's giving a drubbing!" remonstrated another.

"True believers!" cried a woman in a high, quavering voice. "My Mitya—he's a pure soul! What's he done that's bad? He only followed his comrades, them he loved. It's true what she says—why should we leave our children in the lurch? What have they done that's wrong?"

The mother trembled on hearing these words, and wept quietly.

"Go home, Pelagea Nilovna," said Sizov. "Go, mother. You've had enough for one day."

His face was pale, his beard tousled. Suddenly he straightened up and cast a severe glance round.

"All of you know that my son Matvei was killed at the factory," he said impressively. "But if he was alive, I myself would send him after them, after those others. I myself would say to him, 'You go too, Matvei. That's the only true way, the only honest way!'"

He broke off and was silent, and everyone else was silent, in the grip of something new and enormous, of which these people were no longer afraid. Sizov shook his raised fist. "It's an old man speaking," he said. "You all know me. For fifty-three years I've been living on this earth, and for thirty-nine years I've been working here. Today they arrested my nephew again, a good, clever boy. He was marching in front too, beside Vlassov, right next to the banner. . . ." He gave a wave of his hand and some of the life seemed to go out of him. "What this woman said is the truth," he said, taking the mother's arm. "Our children want to live honest sensible lives, and we have left them in the lurch—we have indeed. Come, Pelagea Nilovna."

"Good people," she said, glancing about her with red-rimmed eyes. "Life is for our children. The earth is for them."

"Come, Pelagea Nilovna. Here, take your stick," said Sizov, handing her the broken flagstaff.

They watched the mother sadly and respectfully, whispering words of sympathy. Sizov silently cleared the way for her, and people as silently stepped aside. Drawn by some incomprehensible force, they followed her down the street, exchanging brief remarks in undertones as they went.

When they reached the gate of her house, she turned to them and bowed, leaning on the staff.

"Thank you," she said softly and gratefully.

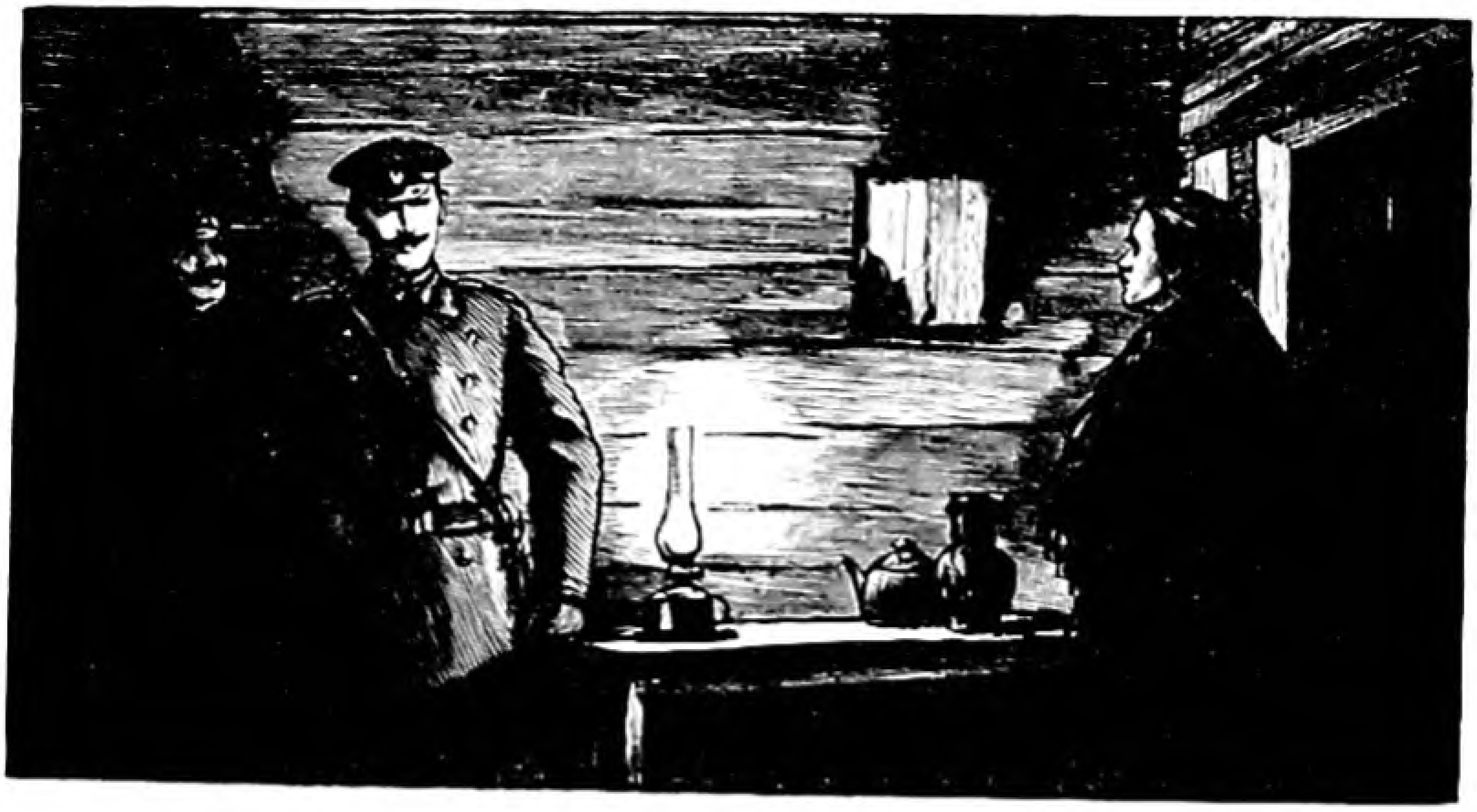
And remembering the thought—the new thought that seemed to have been born in the depth of her heart she added, "There would have been no Lord Jesus if people had not given their lives to bring Him glory."

The crowd gazed at her in silence.

Once more she bowed to the people and then entered her house. Sizov bent his head and followed her.

For a while the people stood about, talking at the gate. Then they slowly walked away.

PART TWO



I

The rest of the day passed in a fog of remembrances, and in the utter weariness which gripped her soul and body. Before her eyes danced the grey spot of the little officer, the bronze face of Pavel, and Andrei's laughing eyes.

She wandered about the room, sat down at the window and looked out into the street, got up again and walked about with lifted brows, starting at the slightest sound, glancing here and there, or senselessly searching for something. She drank water which could neither quench her thirst nor put out the smouldering hurt and longing in her breast. The day had been cleft in two—there had been meaning to the first half, but all meaning had been drained out of the second half, and she was facing a dreary void, giving rise to the question:

"What shall I do now?"

Korsunova came to see her. She waved her hands and shouted, cried and went into ecstasies, stamped her feet, made threats and promises and proposals. None of them moved the mother.

"Aha! The people's up in arms! The whole factory's rose up! The whole factory!" came the peddler's rasping voice.

"Yes," said the mother quietly, nodding her head, but her eyes were fixed on the past, on all that had disappeared along with Pavel and Andrei. She was unable to cry—her heart had shrunk and dried up. Her lips, too, were dry, and there was no moisture in her mouth. Her hands trembled and little chills kept running up and down her back.

That evening the gendarmes came. She met them without surprise or fear. They entered noisily and seemed very cheerful and self-satisfied. The yellow-faced officer bared his teeth in a grin as he said:

"How do you do? This is the third time we have met, if I am not mistaken."

She only ran her dry tongue over her lips. The officer talked a lot, trying to be instructive. She realized that he took pleasure in talking, but his words did not annoy her; they did not even reach her. But when he said, "You yourself are to blame, ma'am, if you were unable to instil in your son a proper respect for God and the tsar," she answered him dully from where she was standing at the door.

"Our children are our judges," she said. "They will properly judge us for abandoning them when they were going down such a hard path."

"What's that?" cried the officer. "Speak up."

"I said our children were our judges," answered the mother with a sigh.

He muttered something crossly, but his words did not reach the mother.

Maria Korsunova was brought in as a witness during the search. She stood next to Pelagea but did not look at her. Whenever the officer asked her a question she would bow deeply and repeat one and the same thing:

"I don't know, Your Excellency. I'm an ignorant woman, who earns her living in trade and so foolish as not to know nothing."

"Hold your tongue!" ordered the officer the first time, wiggling his whiskers. She bowed again, but thumbed her nose at him when his back was turned.

"That for him!" she whispered to the mother.

When she was ordered to search Pelagea, she blinked and stared at the officer.

"Oh, but I don't know how to do a thing like that, Your Excellency!" she said in a frightened voice.

He stamped his foot and shouted at her. Maria dropped her eyes.

"Well, then, you better start unhooking, Pelagea Nilovna," she said to the mother.

Her face was scarlet as she ran her hands over the mother's clothes.

"Phooh, the curs!" she whispered.

"What's that you're saying?" cried the officer, glancing into the corner where the search was taking place.

"Woman's business, Your Excellency," muttered Maria frightenedly.

At last he ordered the mother to sign the papers. Her inexperienced hand printed in large letters:

"Pelagea Vlassova, widow of a workingman."

"What's that you've written there? Why did you write that?" exclaimed the officer with a grimace, adding with a short laugh, "Barbarians!"

They went away. The mother stood at the window with her hands crossed on her breast gazing out without blinking, without seeing, her eyebrows raised, her lips tense, her jaws so tightly clamped that she soon felt the pain. The kerosene lamp went dry; the wick began to crackle, the light to flicker. She blew it out and remained in the dark. She could hardly breathe for the anguish in her heart. On and on she stood, until her eyes and feet ached. She heard Maria come to the window and call out in a drunken voice:

"Asleep, Pelagea? Poor thing, suffering that way! Go to bed!"

The mother lay down without undressing and quickly sank into a deep sleep which engulfed her like the waters of a pool.

She dreamed she was walking past a sandy yellow hill beyond the swamp, on the way to town. Pavel was standing on the edge of a cliff from which workmen were hauling sand, and he was singing in the quiet, musical voice of Andrei:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise! . . .

She walked past the hill with her hand pressed to her brow, looking at her son. His figure stood out sharp and clear against the blue sky. She was ashamed to go up to him because she was pregnant, and in her arms she carried another baby. She kept on until she came to a field in which children were playing with a ball. There were many children, and the ball was red. The baby in her arms reached out for the ball and began to cry. She gave it the breast and turned back, but on the hill now stood soldiers with bayonets pointed at her. Quickly she ran to a church standing in the middle of the field—a white, ethereal church which was immeasurably high and seemed to be made of clouds. Someone was being buried; the coffin was large and black and tightly closed. The priest and the deacon were walking about the church in white vestments and singing:

Hallelujah, Christ is risen. . . .

The deacon bowed and smiled at her as he swung the censer. He had bright red hair and a jolly face, like Samoilov's. Broad rays of sunlight streamed like white scarfs through apertures in the cupola.

In both of the choir lofts, boys were singing:

Hallelujah, Christ is risen. . . .

"Arrest them!" shouted the priest suddenly, coming to a halt in the middle of the church. His vestments vanished and a stiff grey moustache appeared on his upper lip. Everyone fled, including the deacon, who threw the censer aside and clutched his head in the manner of the *khokhol*. The mother dropped her baby at the feet of the running people, but they avoided it, glancing with frightened eyes at its naked body. The mother dropped to her knees and cried to them:

"Don't abandon the child! Take it with you!"

Hallelujah, Christ is risen. . . .

sang the *khokhol*, smiling and holding his hands behind his back.

She bent over and picked up the child and placed it on a cart loaded with boards. Nikolai was walking slowly beside the cart and laughing.

"So they gave me some serious work to do!" he said.

The streets were dirty and people leaned out of the windows of the houses, shouting, whistling and waving their hands. The weather was clear, the sun shone brightly, and nowhere was there a vestige of shadow.

"Sing, *nenko*!" cried the *khokhol*. "Such is life!"

He himself began to sing, drowning out all other sounds. He walked away and the mother followed him. Suddenly she stumbled and fell into a bottomless pit whose emptiness came shrieking up to meet her. . . .

She woke up in a cold sweat. It was as though a rough, heavy hand seized her heart and was slowly squeezing it. The factory whistle was insistently summoning the workers; she recognized it as the second whistle. Books were thrown about the room, everything was topsy-turvy, the floor bore the imprint of muddy boots.

She got up and began to tidy the room without bothering to wash herself or say her prayers. In the kitchen her eyes fell on the broken flagstaff with a bit of bunting still fastened to it. She picked it up and was about to thrust it under the stove, but on second thought she sighed, took off the red cloth, folded it carefully and put it in her pocket. She broke the stick over her knee and threw it on the hearth, washed the windows and floor with cold water, lighted the samovar, and got dressed. Then she sat down by the kitchen window and again faced the question:

"What shall I do now?"

Remembering that she had not yet said her morning prayers, she got up and went over to the icons, but after standing in front of them for a few seconds she sat down again. Her heart was empty.

Everything was strangely quiet, as though the people who had shouted so vociferously yesterday in the street, had hidden themselves in their houses today and were thinking over the unusual events.

Suddenly she recalled an incident of her youth. In the old park of the manor house belonging to the Zausailovs there had been a large pond overgrown with water lilies. On a grey autumn day she had walked past the pond and noticed a boat standing in the middle of it. The pond was dark and quiet and the boat seemed to be pasted to the black water with its dismal pattern of withered leaves. The profound sorrow of some unknown grief was conveyed by the sight of this lonely boat without man or oars, standing motionless on the dull water amid the dead leaves. For a long time she had stood on the bank, wondering who could have pushed the boat out into the water, and for what purpose. That evening she was told that the wife of one of the employees on the estate, a little woman with unruly black hair and a quick walk, had drowned herself in the pond.

The mother drew her hand across her brow and her thoughts floated diffidently among the impressions of the preceding day. For a long time she sat under their spell, staring at a glass of cold tea, while in her soul grew the desire to see and talk to some wise, simple person who could answer all her questions.

As though in response to her longing, Nikolai Ivanovich came to see her after dinner. Yet when she saw him she was suddenly frightened and said quietly, without answering his greeting:

"Why did you come? It was a foolish thing to do! They'll seize you too if they see you here!"

He gave her hand a tight squeeze, pushed up his glasses and leaned close to her.

"Pavel and Andrei and I had an agreement that if they were arrested I would take you to town the next day," he said quickly. His voice was gentle and full of concern for her. "Has there been a search?"

"Yes. They rummaged through everything without shame or conscience!" she exclaimed.

"Why should they be ashamed?" asked Nikolai with a shrug of his shoulders. And he began to explain why she should live in town.

She listened to his friendly, solicitous voice and smiled a faint smile. She did not follow his arguments, but she was surprised by the trust and affection he inspired in her.

"If that's what Pasha wanted," she said, "and if I won't be putting you out any. . . ."

"Don't worry about that," he interrupted. "I live by myself. Sometimes my sister comes to stay with me."

"But I can't live at your expense," she said.

"We can find work for you if you want us to," said Nikolai.

For her, the idea of work was inextricably bound up with the work of her son and Andrei and their comrades. She moved closer to Nikolai and looked into his eyes.

"Can you really?" she asked.

"There isn't much to do in my house, since I'm a bachelor. . . ."

"I wasn't thinking of that—not of housework," she answered softly.

She gave a sigh, hurt that he had not understood. But he smiled in his nearsighted way and said thoughtfully, "If you could find out from Pavel the address of those peasants who asked us to print a paper for them. . . ."

"I know them!" she cried happily. "I'll find them and do anything you ask me to! No one will ever suspect me of spreading what's forbidden. Bless your heart, didn't I take the leaflets into the factory?"

Suddenly she was seized with a desire to wander over the land, past forests and villages, with a knapsack on her back and a staff in her hand.

"Please let me do this! I'll go anywhere, you'll see! I'll find my way along all the roads of all the provinces! Summer and winter—to the very grave—a wandering pilgrim—is that so bad a lot for me?"

She was filled with sadness as she saw herself a homeless wanderer, begging in the name of Christ at the windows of village huts.

Nikolai gently took her hand and patted it with his warm palm. Then he glanced at the clock and said, "We'll talk about that later!"

"If our children, the dearest part of our hearts, can give their lives and their freedom, dying without a thought for themselves, what ought I to do, a mother?" she cried.

Nikolai grew pale.

"I have never heard anyone speak like that before," he said quietly, looking at her fondly and attentively.

"What can I say?" she asked, with a sad shake of her head and a futile gesture of her hands. "If only I had the words to describe this mother's heart beating in me. . . ."

She got up, lifted by a great force that evoked a rush of indignant words.

"Lots of them would weep then—even the lowest of them, the most shameless!"

Nikolai got up too and looked at the clock again.

"So it's agreed? You will come and live with me in town?"

She nodded.

"When? As soon as possible," he said, adding gently, "I shall be worried about you until you do."

She looked at him in surprise. What was she to him? There he stood with his head on one side, smiling shyly, a bent, nearsighted man in a plain black coat. His appearance contradicted his nature.

"Have you any money?" he asked, dropping his eyes.

"No."

Quickly he reached into his pocket and took out his purse, opening it and holding out the money.

"Here, please take it," he said.

The mother smiled involuntarily.

"Everything's different with you!" she said with a shake of her head. "Even money doesn't seem to be worth anything. Some people sell their very souls to get it, but you—you count it as nothing! You seem to keep it about you just to do people a favour."

Nikolai chuckled.

"It's a nasty thing, money. Always so embarrassing to take, or to give away."

He grasped her hand and pressed it hard.

"Come as soon as possible!" he said again.

Then he went out in his quiet way.

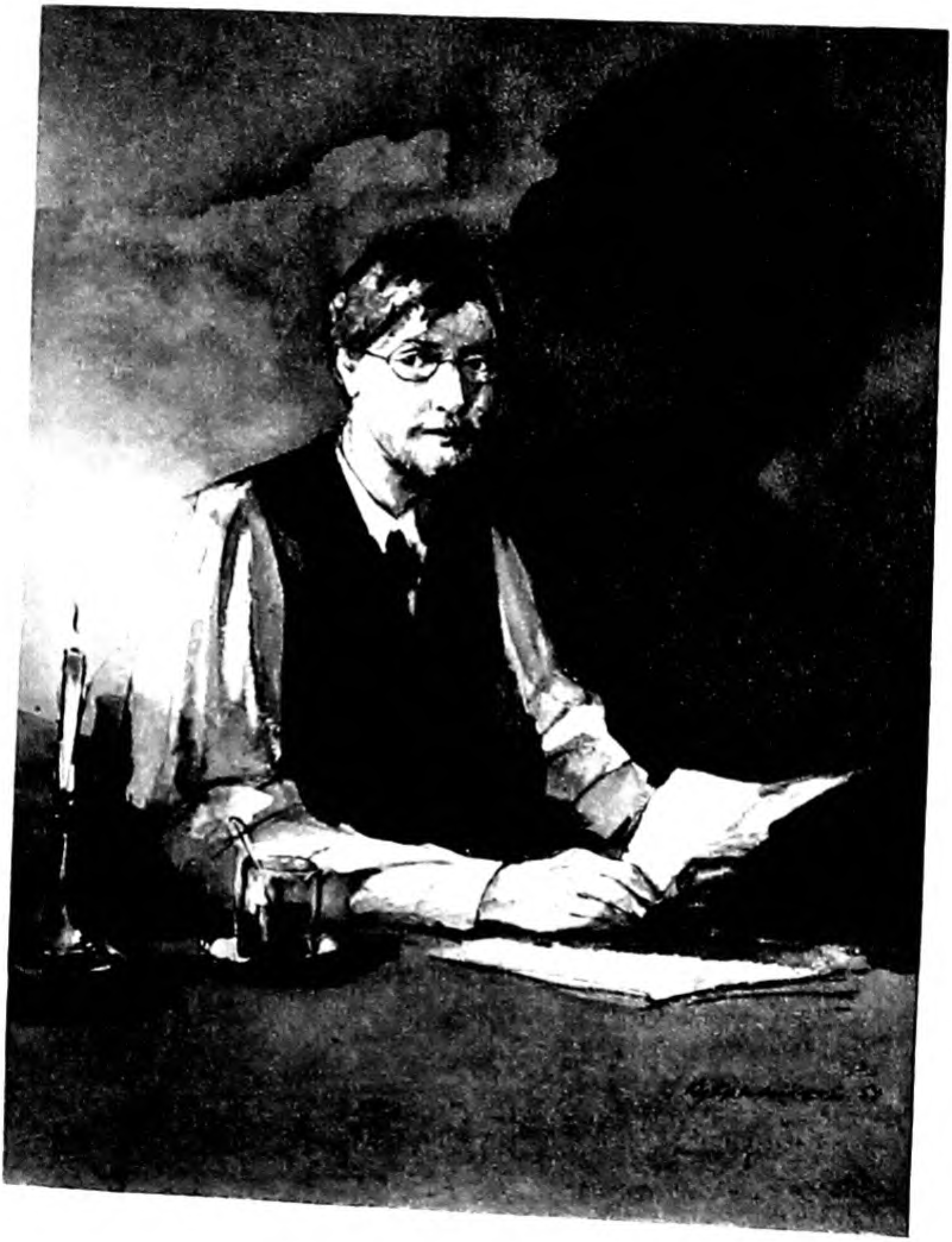
As she saw him to the door she kept thinking:

"Such a kind soul—but he doesn't feel sorry for me."

And she could not tell whether she was displeased, or just surprised by this.

II

She moved into his house on the fourth day after his visit. When the cart with her two trunks on it drove out to the fields beyond the settlement, she turned round and suddenly realized that she was for ever leaving the place where she had passed a dark and difficult stretch of life, and where she had entered upon another, full of new joys and sorrows which made the days pass quickly.



The factory with its smokestacks thrusting into the sky crouched on the soot-blackened earth like a huge red spider. About it clustered the one-storied houses of the workers. They huddled together, grey and dwarfed, on the very edge of the swamp, gazing pitifully at each other out of their dull little windows. Above them rose the church, darkly red like the factory, and its steeple was lower than the smokestacks.

With a sigh the mother loosened the collar of her blouse, which seemed to be choking her.

"Get along there!" muttered the driver, touching the horse with the reins. He was a bowlegged little man of uncertain age, with thin, faded hair on head and face, and with colourless eyes. He rolled from side to side as he walked beside the cart, and it seemed to make no difference to him whether he turned to the right or the left.

"Get along!" he said in a colourless voice, comically kicking out his crooked legs in their heavy boots caked with mud. The mother looked about her. The fields were as empty as her soul.

The horse bobbed its head monotonously as it plodded through the deep, sun-warmed sand. The sand rustled, the rickety cart creaked, and these noises, together with the dust, trailed behind them. . . .

Nikolai Ivanovich lived in a secluded street on the edge of town. His flat was in a small green wing built on to a two-storied house bloated with age. There was a little garden in front, and the branches of lilacs and acacias, and the silver leaves of young poplars glanced into the windows of the three rooms. Inside everything was clean and still, and patterned shadows trembled on the floor; the walls were lined with bookshelves, over which hung portraits of grave-faced people.

"Will you be comfortable here?" asked Nikolai, leading the mother into a small room, one window of which overlooked the garden, while the other opened on to a grass-grown yard. The walls of this room, too, were lined with bookshelves.

"I'd rather live in the kitchen," she said. "The kitchen is nice and clean. . . ."

Her words seemed to frighten him. When she succumbed to his clumsy efforts to dissuade her from living in the kitchen, he instantly brightened up.

All three rooms seemed filled with a special sort of air. It was easy and pleasant to breathe here, but one hesitated to speak in a loud voice for fear of disturbing the people gazing down from the walls with such concentrated attention.

"The plants need watering," observed the mother, feeling the earth in the flowerpots on the window sills.

"Oh, yes," said their owner guiltily. "I am fond of them, but I have no time to look after them."

The mother noticed that even in his cosy flat Nikolai walked about gingerly, as though it was not his own. He would thrust his face close to the various articles in the room, push up his glasses with the thin fingers of his right hand and peer inquiringly at whatever claimed his attention. Sometimes he would hold an object close to his face and seem to feel it with his eyes. It was as though he, like the mother, had entered the flat for the first time, and that for him, as for her, everything was new and unfamiliar. This instantly put her at her ease. She followed him about, taking note of where things stood and asking about the order of his day. He answered in the guilty tones of a man who knows he does not do things as they should be done, but cannot help it.

She watered the flowers and arranged the music scattered on the piano. Catching sight of the samovar, she said:

"It needs polishing."

He ran his finger over the dull metal and held it to his nose for inspection. The mother laughed.

When she went to bed that night and thought back over the events of the day, she lifted her head and glanced about incredulously. This was the first time she had ever spent a night in somebody else's house, yet she did not feel uneasy. She thought solicitously of Nikolai, and was filled with the desire to make things pleasant for him, to show him an affection that would bring warmth and comfort into his life. Her heart was touched by his awkwardness, his amusing incapability, his contrast to the normal run of people, and the wise, yet childlike expression of his clear eyes. Then her mind turned to her son, and once more the events of the First of May passed before her, now clothed in new sounds, winged with new meaning. There was something special about the grief of that day, as about the day itself. This grief did not bend the head to the earth, like the stunning blow of a fist. It pierced the heart with repeated thrusts, which gave rise to a slow wrath, causing the bended back to straighten.

"Our children are going forth into the world," she thought, listening to the unfamiliar, nocturnal sounds of the city which crawled in through the open window, rustling the leaves in the garden. They came from afar, tired and faded, and quietly died within the room.

Early next morning she polished the samovar, boiled the water for tea, noiselessly laid the table, and sat down in the kitchen to wait for Nikolai to get up. At last he opened the door with a cough, holding his glasses in one hand and the collar of his shirt in the other. They exchanged greetings, and then she carried the samovar into the other room while he washed, splashing water on the floor, dropping the soap and his toothbrush, grumbling at his clumsiness.

At breakfast he said to her, "I perform a sad duty at the Zemstvo Board—that of observing how our peasants are being ruined." He smiled guiltily. "Undernourishment is killing the peasants prematurely. Their children are born weak and die off like flies in autumn. We know all this, and we know the reason for it. We are even paid salaries to observe the process, but that's as far as it goes."

"Are you a student?" she asked him.

"No, I'm a teacher. My father is a factory manager in Vyatka, but I became a teacher. In the village I distributed books among the muzhiks, and for this I was put in jail. After serving my sentence, I became a salesman in a bookshop, but through my own carelessness I was put in jail again and then exiled to Archangel. There, too, I got into the bad graces of the governor, and was shipped to a little village on the shore of the White Sea, where I lived for five years."

His voice flowed on smoothly in the bright, sunny room. The mother had by this time heard many such stories, but she could never understand why the people who told them were always so calm, as though they were speaking of something inevitable.

"My sister is coming today," he said.

"Is she married?"

"She's a widow. Her husband was exiled to Siberia, but he ran away; two years ago he died in Europe of consumption."

"Is she younger than you?"

"Six years older. I am very much indebted to her. Wait till you hear her play. That's her piano. And many of these things are hers. The books are mine."

"Where does she live?"

"Everywhere," he answered with a smile. "Wherever they need a courageous person, there she is."

"Does she also go in for—this work?"

"Oh yes!" he answered.

Soon he went away, and the mother began to think about "this work," and about the people who were calmly and persistently devoting themselves to it day after day. And she felt dwarfed by them, as one feels dwarfed by a mountain at night.

At about noon a tall handsome woman in a black dress rang the bell. When the mother opened the door the woman dropped her little yellow satchel on the floor and grasped the mother's hand.

"I suppose you are Pavel Mikhailovich's mother?" she said.

"Yes," answered the mother, discomfited by the woman's fine clothes.

"You are just as I imagined you would be. My brother wrote me that you were coming here to live," said the woman as she took off her hat in front of the mirror. "I have been a friend of Pavel Mikhailovich's for a long time. He told me about you."

Her voice was husky and she spoke slowly, but her movements were quick and strong. In striking contrast to the youth of her grey eyes were the fine little lines that could be traced at her temples, and the grey hair shining above the delicate shells of her ears.

"I'm hungry!" she announced. "I'd like a cup of coffee."

"I'll make it," said the mother. "Did you say Pavel had spoken to you about me?" she asked as she reached into the cupboard for the coffeepot.

"Very often." The woman took out a little leather cigarette case, lighted up, and walked up and down. "Are you dreadfully afraid for him?"

The mother watched the little blue flames of the alcohol burner under the coffeepot and smiled. Happiness swallowed up the embarrassment she had felt in the presence of this woman.

"So he told her about me, the blessed boy!" she thought to herself, then she said slowly, "Of course I am. It isn't an easy thing, but it would have been even harder if it had happened before. Now at least I know he isn't alone."

With a glance into the woman's face, the mother asked what her name was.

"Sophia," came the answer.

The mother studied her intently. There was something sweeping about this woman—almost too bold and hurried.

"The most important thing is that they all be freed as soon as possible," said Sophia confidently. "If only they would hurry with the trial! As soon as they send them into exile, we'll arrange an escape for Pavel Mikhailovich. He's needed here."

The mother glanced uncertainly at Sophia, who was looking for something in which to place her cigarette end. At last she crushed it in the earth of a flowerpot.

"That spoils the flowers," said the mother involuntarily.

"Forgive me," said Sophia. "Nikolai always tells me the same thing." She removed the end and threw it out of the window.

The mother, embarrassed, shot her a guilty glance.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I didn't think of what I was saying. How can I tell you what to do!"

"Why not, if I am so untidy?" answered Sophia with a shrug of her shoulders. "Is the coffee ready? Thanks. But why only one cup? Aren't you having any?"

Suddenly she took the mother by the shoulders and drew her close, looking deep into her eyes.

"Are you feeling shy?" she asked.

The mother smiled.

"After I blurted out that about the cigarette, how could I help feeling shy? But just see," she added, without attempting to hide her wonder, "I only came here yesterday, but I feel as if it was my own house already—I'm not afraid of anything, and I say whatever comes to my mind. . . ."

"That's exactly as it should be!" exclaimed Sophia.

"My head keeps going round and I don't know myself," resumed the mother. "There was a time then I had to know a person through and through before I'd open my heart to him, but now my heart's always open, and I say things I never would have dreamed of saying before."

Sophia took another cigarette and turned the soft illumination of her grey eyes on the mother's face.

"You say you'll see that he escapes. But how'll he go on living—a runaway?" asked the mother, unburdening her heart of this troublesome question.

"That won't be hard," answered Sophia, pouring herself out another cup of coffee. "He'll go on living like dozens of other runaways. I just met one of them and showed him where he was to live. He too is very much needed. Ha was sentenced to five years, but he only spent three and a half months in exile."

The mother looked at her for some time, then smiled.

"Looks as though that First of May had done something to me," she said softly, with a shake of her head. "I can't seem to get my bearings—as if I was going down two different roads at once. Sometimes I seem to understand everything, then again everything's all in a fog. Take you, for instance—a gentlewoman, going in for this work. . . . You know my Pavel and speak well of him, and I thank you for that."

"It's you who deserves the thanks," laughed Sophia.

"What have I done? It wasn't me that taught him all this," sighed the mother.

Sophia crushed her cigarette in a saucer and shook her head until her golden hair came tumbling down in thick masses to her waist.

"Time for me to take off all this finery," she said, getting up and going out.

III

Nikolai returned in the evening. As they were having dinner, Sophia laughingly described how she had met and hid away a man escaped from exile, how afraid of spies she had been, suspecting everyone, and how comically the fugitive had behaved. The mother found something almost boastful in her tone, as if she were a worker telling the story of a hard job done well.

Now she was wearing a grey summer dress with a full skirt. It made her look even taller, her eyes seemed darker and her movements more composed.

"There's another task waiting for you, Sophia," said Nikolai after dinner. "I told you we had agreed to publish a paper for the peasants, but with all these arrests we've lost contact with the man who is to distribute it. Pelagea

Nilovna is the only one who can help us find him. You must take a trip to the country with her, and do it as soon as possible."

"Very well," said Sophia, drawing on her cigarette. "We'll go, won't we, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"We will."

"Is it far?"

"About eighty versts."

"That's all right. And now I'd like to have a little music. Do you think you could stand my playing a bit, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"Don't bother about me—go on as if I wasn't here at all," said the mother, shrinking into a corner of the couch. The brother and sister appeared not to pay any attention to her, but they kept subtly drawing her into the conversation.

"Listen to this, Nikolai, it's Grieg. I brought it with me today. Close the windows."

She opened the music and began playing lightly with her left hand. The strings sang out in a full deep voice, and with a low sigh another voice joined in. From beneath the fingers of her right hand flew out a bright flock of golden trills, rushing and careening like frightened birds against the dark background of the bass.

At first the mother was unmoved by the music, whose flow was to her only a chaos of sound. Her ear was unable to catch the melody in the complicated harmonic structure. Dreamily she watched Nikolai, who was sitting at the other end of the couch with his legs drawn up under him, gazing at Sophia's severe profile crowned by a mass of golden hair. The sun warmly illumined Sophia's head and shoulders and slipped down to the keyboard to caress her fingers. The music swelled and filled the room, all unnoticeably reaching the heart of the mother.

For some reason, from the dark pit of the past rose a great hurt, long forgotten, but now resurrected with bitter clarity.

Late one night her husband had returned home dead drunk. Seizing her by the arm, he had dragged her out of bed on to the floor and kicked her in the side.

"Get out of here, you bitch! I'm sick of you!" he shouted.

To protect herself from his blows, she picked up her two-year-old son and held him in front of her to shield herself as she knelt on the floor. The child had cried and struggled in her arms, warm and naked and frightened.

"Get out!" roared Mikhail.

She had jumped to her feet, rushed into the kitchen, thrown a jacket over her shoulders, wrapped the baby in a shawl, and silently, without cry or complaint, barefoot, clothed only in a nightdress and jacket, had left the house. It was May, and the night was chilly. The dust of the street clung coldly to the soles of her feet and got in between her toes. The child in her arms cried and struggled. She pressed him to her body beneath the jacket and rushed down the street pursued by fear, crooning to the child as she went:

"Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h!"

Dawn came. Ashamed and afraid to have anyone meet her in her half-naked state, she went to the swamp and sat down under some young aspens. There she remained for a long time, staring into the darkness with wide-open eyes, crooning monotonously to soothe the drowsing child and the hurt in her own heart:

"Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h!"

Suddenly a black bird flashed by. It startled her out of her apathy and made her get up. Shivering with cold, she turned homeward—back to the familiar horror of beatings and insults. . . .

The last chord sounded. With a cold, indifferent sigh the music died away.

Sophia turned to her brother.

"Did you like it?" she asked quietly.

"Immensely," he replied, rousing as though from sleep. "Immensely."

The echo of her reminiscences trembled on in the mother's breast, while at the edge of consciousness a thought was taking shape:

"There *are* people who live together in a friendly, peaceful way. They don't quarrel, they don't get drunk, they don't fight over every crust of bread as the people in that other dark life do. . . ."

Sophia took a cigarette. She smoked a lot, almost continuously.

"That was Kostya's favourite," she said. She inhaled deeply, turned to the keys again, struck a soft, sorrowful chord. "How I loved to play to him! How sensitive he was, responding to everything, his heart fairly bursting!"

"She must be thinking of her husband," mused the mother. "And with a smile!. . ."

"How happy he made me!" continued Sophia softly, improvising lightly as she spoke. "He knew how to live!"

"He did indeed," agreed Nikolai, stroking his beard. "His was a singing soul."

Sophia threw away the cigarette she had just lighted and turned to the mother.

"I hope my noise is not annoying you," she said.

The mother could not conceal her chagrin.

"Don't pay any attention to me. I don't understand. I just sit here and listen, busy with my own thoughts."

"But I want you to understand!" said Sophia. "A woman ought to understand music, especially when she's sad."

She struck the keys sharply and the piano cried out as if someone had received dreadful news. It must have been struck to the very quick to produce such a stunning cry. Frightened young voices leaped up in response, and rushed away. Once more came a loud, wrathful cry, drowning out everything else. Some great misfortune had happened, but it evoked a feeling of wrath rather than of pity. Then came a strong voice singing a plain and lovely tune, persuasive and alluring.

The mother longed to say kind words to these people. She was drunk with the music, and she smiled, certain that she could be of use to this brother and sister.

She looked about—what could she do? Quietly she slipped into the kitchen and lighted the samovar.

But this did not satisfy her yearning to do something for them, and as she poured out the tea she said with an embarrassed laugh, as though consoling her heart with words meant as much for herself as for them:

"We people from that dark life—we feel everything, but it's hard to put it in words, and we're ashamed, because you see—we understand, but we can't say it. And often—in our shame—we resent our thoughts. Life keeps jabbing at us from all sides; we'd like to have a rest, but our thoughts won't give it to us."

Nikolai wiped his glasses as he listened, and Sophia opened wide her enormous eyes and forgot to smoke her cigarette, which threatened to go out. She was still sitting at the piano, half-turned towards her brother, occasionally touching the keys lightly with her right hand. The chords merged softly with the simple, heartfelt words in which the mother was giving expression to her feeling.

"Now I can say something about myself and about all people, because—I begin to understand and am able to compare. Before, there was nothing to compare things to. Everybody lives alike in our life. But now when I see how other people live and remember how I lived—it's a bitter thing." She lowered her voice. "Maybe I'm not putting it just right, and maybe there's no sense in saying it at all, since there's nothing new in it for you." There were tears in her voice, but her eyes smiled as she looked at them. "I want to open my heart to you," she said. "I want you to know all the good, all the happiness I'm wishing you!"

"We do know," said Nikolai softly.

She seemed unable to satisfy her yearning, and went on telling them things that were new to her and incalculably important. She told them about her bitter life and patient suffering, speaking without rancour, but with a sardonic twist of her lips. She unrolled the ribbon of grey days that had made up her former life, recounting the beatings she had received from her husband, marvelling at their inconsequential cause and her inability to prevent them.

As they listened in silence, they were struck by the profound meaning behind the life-story of one who had been looked upon as little more than an animal, and who had meekly accepted this appraisal of herself. It seemed that thousands of people were speaking through her; all that she had lived through was simple and commonplace—as simple and commonplace as the lives of the vast majority upon this earth—and her story assumed the significance of a symbol. Nikolai put his elbows on the table, rested his head on his hands, and watched her through his glasses with narrowed eyes. Sophia leaned back in her chair, shuddering occasionally and shaking her head. Her face seemed to grow thinner and paler, and she did not smoke.

"Once I considered myself unfortunate," Sophia said quietly, dropping her eyes. "I seemed to live in a delirium. That was when I was in exile in a tiny provincial town. I had nothing to do, and nothing to think about except myself. As a means of whiling away the time, I would go over and over all my misfortunes: I had quarrelled with a father whom I loved; I had been expelled from school and held up as a shameful example; I had been put in jail; a close friend had betrayed me; my husband had been arrested; I had been put in jail again and exiled; then my husband had died. It seemed to me I was the unhappiest creature in the world. But all my misfortunes, and ten times more, could not equal one month of your life, Pelagea Nilovna. Yours was daily torture, drawn out year after year. Where do people get the strength to endure such suffering?"

"They get used to it," answered Pelagea with a sigh.

"I flatter myself that I know life fairly well," said Nikolai thoughtfully. "Yet whenever I get a first-hand view of it like this—not a book view, and not my own tattered impressions—it seems ghastly. And it's the little things that are ghastly—the insignificant moments making up the years."

They talked on and on, touching on all aspects of this dark life. The mother lost herself in reminiscences, drawing out of the twilight of the past all the daily insults that had made a horror of her youth.

"But here I go on talking and talking when it's time for you to go to bed," she said at last. "You can't ever tell all there is to be told."

The brother and sister silently took leave of her. Nikolai seemed to bow lower than usual, and he pressed her hand with particular warmth. Sophia saw her to her room.

"Good night. Have a good rest," she said as she left her. Her voice was full of feeling, and her grey eyes rested tenderly on the mother's face.

Pelagea took Sophia's hand in both of hers.

"Thank you," she said.

IV

A few days later the mother and Sophia appeared before Nikolai in the garb of poor townswomen. They were wearing worn cotton dresses and jackets, had sacks on their backs and staffs in their hands. Sophia looked shorter in these clothes, and her pale face was graver than ever.

Nikolai pressed his sister's hand tightly as he said goodbye to her, and again the mother was impressed by the calm simplicity of their relationship. They did not kiss each other or use endearing terms, but they were always deeply concerned about each other. Where she had lived, people kept kissing and using endearing terms, but they snapped at one another like hungry dogs.

The women silently made their way through the streets of the town and out to the fields, walking side by side down a wide uneven road between two rows of old birches.

"Won't you get tired?" the mother said to Sophia.

"I've done a great deal of walking in my time. I'm used to it."

Sophia began to speak gaily about her revolutionary activities, as though she were recounting the pranks of her childhood. She had lived under different names and with false documents. She had disguised herself to hide from spies, carried heavy bundles of illegal literature from town to town, arranged escapes for comrades in exile, and escorted them to cities abroad. Once she had housed a secret print shop in her apartment, and when the gendarmes had found out and come to search the house, she had just managed to disguise herself as a chambermaid and escape, passing the gendarmes at the gate. It had been a cold winter day, and in only a light dress, with a cotton kerchief over her head, she had walked the entire length of the city with an oil tin in her hand as though she were going to buy kerosene.

Another time she had arrived in a strange city to visit some friends, and on climbing the steps to their flat discovered it was being searched. It was too late to turn back, so she boldly rang the bell of the flat downstairs and planted herself, bag and baggage, on those unknown people.

"You can hand me over to the police if you wish, but I hardly think you would do such a thing," she had said after frankly explaining the situation.

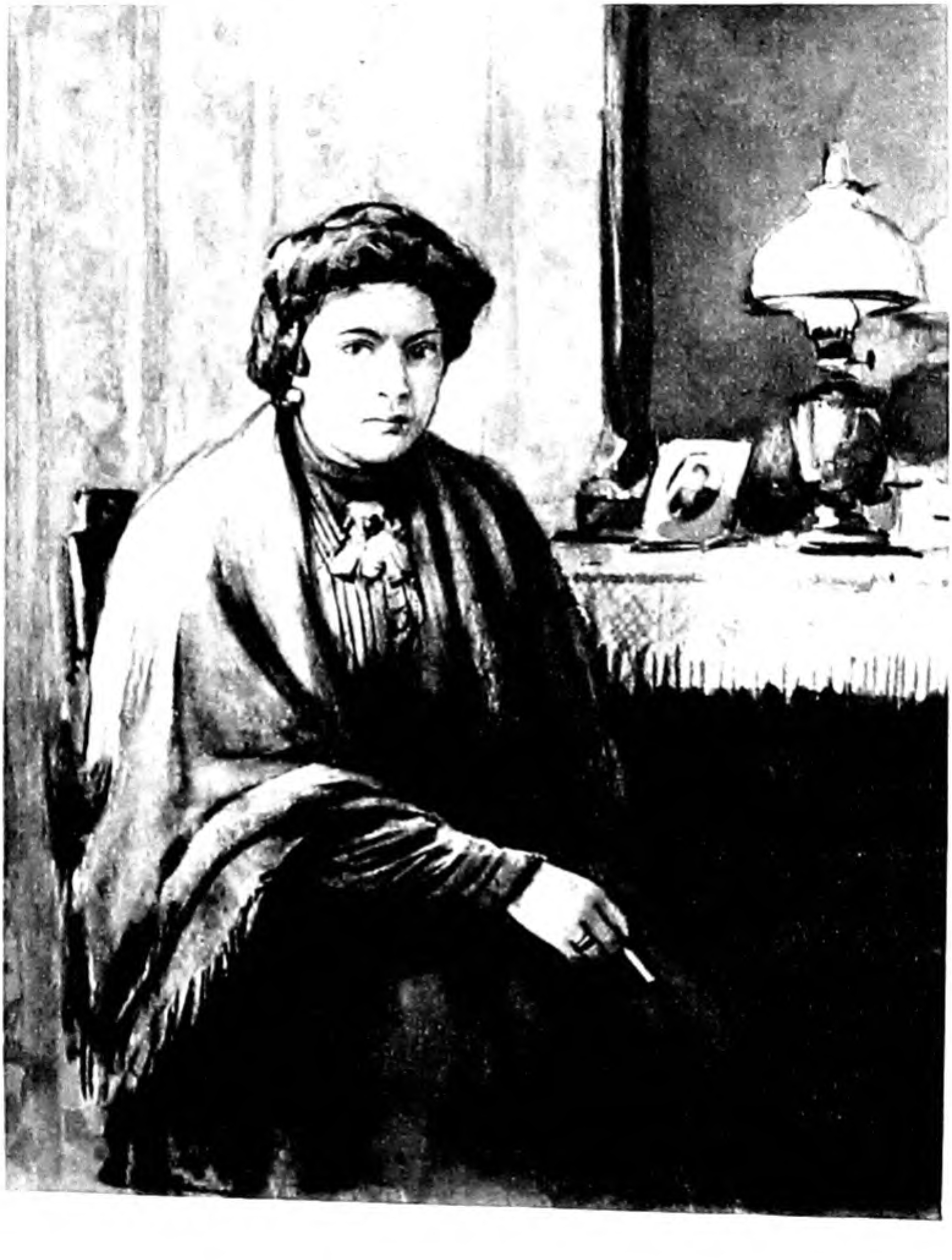
They were so frightened that they did not sleep a wink all night, expecting a knock at their door any minute, but they did not hand her over, and on the next morning laughed heartily at the adventure.

Still another time she had dressed as a nun and travelled in the same railway carriage, even in the same compartment, as the spy who was following her. He had boasted to her of how cunningly he was tracking this woman. He thought she was riding in a second-class carriage of the same train; at every station he would get out to look for her, and on returning would say to the nun:

"Nowhere to be seen—probably gone to sleep. They get worn out too—their life's no easier than ours."

The mother laughed and glanced at her companion affectionately as she listened to these stories. Sophia, tall and slender, stepped along lightly on her shapely feet. There was something brave and wholesome in her manner of walking and talking, in her cheerful, husky voice, in all of her straight figure. She had a youthful approach to everything, and wherever she looked she was sure to find something to bring her joy.

"What a lovely pine!" cried Sophia, pointing to one of



the trees. The mother stopped and looked—the pine was just like all the others.

"Yes, it's a nice tree," she laughed, watching the wind blow wisps of grey hair about the other woman's ear.

"A lark!" Sophia's grey eyes glowed with tenderness and her entire body strained toward the invisible music sounding in the clear sky. Sometimes her supple body would stop to pick a wild flower whose trembling petals she would stroke with quick thin fingers as she softly hummed a tune.

All this won the mother to the woman with the grey eyes, and she walked close beside her, trying to keep in step. But sometimes Sophia spoke sharply. The mother regretted this.

"Rybin won't like her," she thought anxiously.

But the next minute Sophia was again speaking warmly and simply, and the mother glanced up at her with a smile.

"How young you still are!" she sighed.

"I'm thirty-two already!" exclaimed Sophia.

Pelagea smiled.

"That isn't what I mean. According to your looks I might give you even more. But when I listen to you and look into your eyes I'm always surprised—you're just like a young girl. You lead a hard and dangerous life, but the heart of you is always smiling."

"I'm never aware of the hardness, and it seems to me that no life could be better or more interesting than mine. I shall call you by your patronymic—Nilovna. Somehow Pelagea doesn't suit you."

"Call me whatever you like," said the mother thoughtfully. "Just whatever you like. I keep looking at you and listening and thinking my thoughts. It makes me happy to see you've found the way to the human heart. A person tells you all that is going on inside him without fear; opens up his soul to you of his own accord. And when I think about all you people, I'm certain you'll overcome the evil in life—I'm certain of it."

"We will, because we are one with the working people," said Sophia with loud assurance. "A great force is hidden in them; they can do anything! We only have to make them aware of their own worth, so that they will be free to develop. . . ."

Her words gave rise to mixed feelings in the mother's heart. For some reason she felt sorry for Sophia, in an inoffensive, friendly way, and she wanted to hear her speak other, more simple words.

"Who will ever reward you for your efforts?" she asked quietly and sadly.

"We have already been rewarded," answered Sophia, and it seemed to the mother that there was pride in her voice. "We have found a way of life that suits us. We live with all the powers of the spirit—what else could we ask of life?"

The mother glanced at her and dropped her eyes once more thinking:

"Rybin won't like her."

They walked quickly, but without haste, breathing deep of the sweet air, and the mother imagined that she was going on a pilgrimage. She recalled the joy with which, in her childhood, she had left her village to attend holiday services at a distant monastery where there was a miracle-working icon.

Sometimes Sophia would sing some new song about the sky or about love, in a soft melodious voice; or sometimes she would recite poems about the fields and forests and the Volga, and the mother would listen and smile, involuntarily nodding in rhythm to the verse, succumbing to its music.

She felt all warm and quiet and thoughtful inside, as if she were in a cosy garden nook on a summer evening.

V

They arrived at their destination on the third day. The mother asked a muzhik who was working in the fields where the tar works were, and soon they were going down a steep woodland path where the roots of the trees formed convenient steps. This brought them out on a round clearing littered with coal and chips and caked with tar.

"Well, here we are!" said the mother, looking uneasily about her.

In front of a shelter made of poles and branches stood a table consisting of three boards laid across wooden horses. Rybin, black with tar, his shirt open, was having dinner at this table with Yefim and two other young boys. Rybin was the first to notice the women and he waited for them to approach without a word, one hand shielding his eyes from the sun.

"Good day, brother Mikhailo!" cried the mother from a distance.

He got up and walked toward them unhurriedly. When he recognized her, he stopped and smiled, stroking his beard with a dark hand.

"We're on a pilgrimage," said the mother, approaching. "So I thought I'd stop in to see how you were getting on. This is my friend—Anna's her name."

Proud of her ingenuity, she glanced out of the corner of her eye into Sophia's face, which was stern and serious.

"How d'ye do," said Rybin, with a crooked smile as he shook her hand and bowed to Sophia. "Don't lie. You're not in the city now—don't need any lies here. All our own people."

Yefim studied the pilgrims from where he was sitting at the table, and he whispered something to his companions.

When the women came over, he got up and silently bowed to them. His companions sat motionless, as though they did not notice the guests.

"We live here like monks," said Rybin, patting Pelagea lightly on the shoulder. "Nobody ever comes to see us. The boss is away, his wife's in hospital, and I'm more or less in charge. Have a seat. Probably want something to eat. Bring some milk, Yefim."

Yefim sauntered into the shelter, and the pilgrims took the packs off their backs. One of the young boys, a tall, thin chap, got up and helped them, while his shaggy, stocky companion kept sitting with his elbows on the table, watching them thoughtfully as he scratched his head and hummed a tune.

The pungent odour of tar and rotting leaves made the women dizzy.

"His name's Yakov," said Rybin, pointing to the tall fellow, "and the other is Ignat. Well, how's your son?"

"He's in jail," answered the mother with a sigh.

"Again?" exclaimed Rybin. "Must like it."

Ignat stopped singing and Yakov took the staff out of the mother's hands.

"Sit down," he said.

"Why are you standing there? Sit down," said Rybin to Sophia. Silently she took a seat on a stump, studying Rybin attentively.

"When did they arrest him?" asked Rybin, taking his place opposite the mother and shaking his head. "You have no luck, Nilovna."

"It's all right," she said.

"Getting used to it, are you?"

"No, I'm not getting used to it, but I see it can't be helped."

"Hm," said Rybin. "Well, tell us about it."

Yefim brought a jug of milk, took a cup from the table, rinsed it, filled it with milk and offered it to Sophia, as he listened attentively to the mother's story. He was careful to make no noise. When the mother finished her brief account, nobody said anything or looked at anyone else for a while. Ignat was sitting at the table drawing on the boards with his fingernail; Yefim was standing behind Rybin with his elbow on his shoulder; Yakov was leaning against the trunk of a tree, his arms crossed and his head lowered; Sophia sat studying the muzhiks from under her brows. . . .

"Hm-m-m," said Rybin slowly and cheerlessly, "so that's how—openly."

"If we ever held a parade like that," said Yefim with a glum smile, "the muzhiks would beat us to death."

"Sure, they'd kill us," agreed Ignat with a nod. "I'm going off to work in a factory. It's better there."

"You say there'll be a trial for Pavel?" asked Rybin. "And what'll the sentence be? Have you heard?"

"Hard labour or permanent exile to Siberia," she answered quietly.

The three young boys all turned to her at the same time.

"Did he know what it would mean when he did it?" asked Rybin, bowing his head.

"Yes, he did," said Sophia in a loud voice.

Everyone was silent and motionless, as though frozen by this thought.

"Hm-m," resumed Rybin with solemn importance. "I'm sure he did. He wouldn't take a leap in the dark—he's too serious. Hear that, fellows? He knew they might stick their bayonets into him or send him to Siberia, but it didn't stop him. If his own mother'd lain across his path, he'd have stepped right over her, wouldn't he, Nilovna?"

"Yes, he would," said the mother with a start. She sighed and glanced round. Sophia silently patted her hand and stared at Rybin with knitted brows.

"There's a man for you!" he said quietly, looking at all of them with his dark eyes. Again the six people were silent. Thin rays of sun hung in the air like golden ribbons. Somewhere a crow cawed. The mother was agitated by memories of May Day, and by her longing for Pavel and for Andrei. Empty tar barrels were scattered about the little clearing, and uprooted stumps stuck up all about. Oaks and birches crowded motionless at the edge, casting warm dark shadows on the earth.

Suddenly Yakov pushed away from the tree and walked off to one side.

"Is it against fellows like him they'll send me and Yefim when we're conscripted?" he asked loudly, throwing back his head.

"Who did you think they'd send you against?" answered Rybin. "They use our own hands to choke us with—that's the whole trick!"

"But I'm going to be a soldier anyway," said Yefim stubbornly.

"Who's stopping you?" cried Ignat. "Go ahead. Only," he added with a short laugh, "when you shoot at me, aim at my head—don't make a cripple of me; kill me straightaway."

"You said that once before," replied Yefim testily.

"Just a minute, fellows," said Rybin, raising his hand. "Here's a woman," indicating the mother, "whose son's probably done for. . . ."

"Why should you say that?" asked the mother, wincing.

"It has to be said," he answered gravely. "So that your hair won't have turned grey for nothing. And do you suppose they killed her by doing this to her son? Nilovna, have you brought the leaflets?"

The mother glanced at him.

"Yes. . . ." she said after a pause.

"See?" said Rybin, striking the table with his fist. "I knew it as soon as I saw you. What else could have brought you here? See? They knocked her son out of the ranks—his mother took his place!"

He shook his fist and gave a mighty oath.

The mother, frightened, glanced into his face and saw that it had changed: it had grown thinner, his beard was unkempt, and beneath it could be felt his protruding cheekbones. Fine red veins had appeared on the bluish whites of his eyes, as though he had not slept for a long time. His nose was pinched and hooked, like that of a bird of prey. His open collar, once red but now black with tar, revealed prominent collarbones and the thick black hair on his chest. His whole appearance was more sombre and funereal than ever. In his inflamed eyes smouldered wrathful fires, which lighted up his dark face. Sophia sat pale and silent, unable to take her eyes off these muzhiks. Ignat shook his head and squinted, while Yakov, going over to the shelter, stood angrily tearing bits of bark off the poles. Yefim walked slowly up and down beside the table, behind the mother's back. Rybin began to talk again.

"Not long ago the chief of our district sent for me and said: 'What's that you told the priest, you scoundrel?' 'Scoundrel?' says I. 'I earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and I don't do any harm.' He roared at me and smashed me in the teeth, and for three days they kept me in jail. 'So that's how you talk to the common folk, is it?' thinks I. 'Then don't expect us to forget it, you old devil! Someone else will get even with you or your children if I don't do it myself—remember that! You've ploughed up the breasts of the people with your iron claws and planted hate there, so don't expect any mercy, you fiends!' That's what!"

His face was scarlet with the rage boiling within him, and there were notes in his voice that frightened the mother.

"And what was it I had said to the priest?" he went on more calmly. "Once, after making his rounds of the village, he was sitting talking to some muzhiks—telling them the common folk were a flock of sheep always in need of a shepherd. Hm. So I says jokingly: 'Once they make the fox head of the animals, there'll be plenty of feathers flying, but few birds.' He cocks his head at me and says something about how the people have to be long-suffering and pray to God to give them the strength to endure their trials and tribulations. So I says that the people do a lot of praying as it is, but it seems God's too busy to listen to them. Hm. So then he asks me what prayers I pray, and I answer: 'One and the same prayer all my life, like all the rest of the common folk: Dear God, please teach me how to eat stones and spit logs in the service of the gentlefolk.' But he didn't give me a chance to finish." Suddenly Rybin turned to Sophia. "You a gentlewoman?" he asked.

"Why a gentlewoman?" she asked quickly, starting in surprise.

"Why?" snorted Rybin. "Because you were born that way, I guess. It's everybody's fate to be what he was born. Hm. Think you can hide the sins of the gentlefolk under that peasant kerchief on your head? We know a priest when we meet him, even if he's tied in a sack. You shuddered and made a face when you stuck your elbow in something spilled on the table. And your back's too straight for a workingwoman's."

The mother broke in, afraid he would hurt Sophia with his rough ridicule.

"She's my friend, Mikhailo Ivanovich, and a mighty fine person. Her hair's gone grey in our cause. You're rather sharp."

Rybin gave a deep sigh.

"Why, have I said anything out of the way?"

"I think you wanted to tell me something," said Sophia dryly.

"Did I? Oh yes. A new fellow turned up here not long ago—Yakov's cousin. He's got consumption. Shall I send for him?"

"Do," said Sophia.

Rybin glanced at her through narrowed eyes for a minute.

"Go and tell him to come over this evening," he said to Yefim.

Yefim put on his cap, and without a word or a glance at anyone, disappeared in the forest. Rybin nodded after him.

"Having a hard time of it," he said. "Be conscripted soon—him and Yakov. Yakov makes no bones about it: says it's not for him. It's not for Yefim either, but he wants to go. Thinks he can stir up the soldiers. But I hold you can't batter down a wall with your head. Give a man a gun, and he'll march in step. But Yefim's having a hard time of it, and Ignat here keeps plaguing him. No sense in that."

"Yes, there is," said Ignat sullenly, without looking at Rybin. "Before they're through with him he'll be shooting for them as good as anybody else."

"I don't believe it," answered Rybin thoughtfully. "Though it'd be better if he didn't go. Russia's a big place—

where'd they ever find him? He could get himself a false passport and go from village to village."

"That's what I'm going to do," said Ignat, slapping his foot with a stick. "Once you've made up your mind to turn against them, you've got to keep going straight ahead."

The conversation broke off. Bees and wasps circled about busily, filling the air with their buzz. Birds chirped, and a song came straggling over the fields.

"Well, time for us to get to work," said Rybin after a pause. "Maybe you'd like to have a rest. There are some bunks in the shelter. Go fetch some dry leaves, Yakov. And give us the leaflets, mother."

The mother and Sophia began to untie their packs.

"What a lot you've brought!" exclaimed Rybin happily as he bent over the packs. "Been mixed up in this business long—er—what's your name?" he asked Sophia.

"Anna Ivanovna," she answered. "Twelve years. Why do you ask?"

"No special reason. Been in jail?"

"Yes."

"See?" said the mother reprovingly. "And you were so rude. . . ."

"Don't mind me," he grinned, picking up one of the bundles of books, "Gentlefolk and muzhiks are like tar and water—don't mix."

"But I'm not a gentlewoman—I'm a human being," objected Sophia with a soft laugh.

"Perhaps," replied Rybin. "They say dogs were once wolves. I'll go hide this stuff."

Ignat and Yakov went over to him with outstretched hands.

"Let's see them," said Ignat.

"Are they all the same?" Rybin asked Sophia.

"No, there are some newspapers too."

"That's good."

The three men hurried into the shelter.

"The muzhik is stirred up," said the mother quietly, following Rybin with a thoughtful gaze.

"Yes," answered Sophia. "I've never seen a face like his before—that of a martyr. Let's go in there too; I want to watch them."

"Don't let his harshness hurt you," said the mother gently.

Sophia laughed.

"What a darling you are, Nilovna!"

When they reached the entrance, Ignat raised his head and threw them a quick glance, then he ran his fingers through his curly hair and bent over the paper spread out on his knees; Rybin was standing holding his paper in a ray of sunlight coming through a crack in the roof, moving his lips as he read; Yakov was on his knees before a pile of leaflets spread out on a bunk.

The mother crossed to a corner of the shelter and sat down, while Sophia stood behind her with her hand on her shoulder, silently watching the men.

"They're finding fault with us muzhiks, Uncle Mikhailo," said Yakov quietly, without turning round. Rybin looked at him and laughed.

"That's because they love us," he said.

Ignat took a deep breath and raised his head.

"Here it says, 'The peasant no longer looks like a human being.' Of course he doesn't." A shadow passed over his plain, open face, as though he were offended. "Well, climb inside my skin for a while and we'll see what *you* look like, smarty!"

"I'm going to lie down," said the mother to Sophia. "I'm tired, and this smell makes my head swim. What about you?"

"I don't want to rest."

The mother lay down on the bunk and began to doze. Sophia sat beside her watching the men and driving away any wasps or bees that came to disturb the elder woman's rest. The mother watched her through half-closed eyes, touched by such thoughtfulness.

Rybin came over.

"Asleep?" he said in a loud whisper.

"Yes."

He stood for a while silently studying the mother's face.

"I guess she's the first who's ever followed a son down this road," he said at last, with a sigh.

"We mustn't disturb her. Let's go out," said Sophia.

"Got to be getting to work. Like to have a talk with you, but we'll have to put that off till evening. Come on, boys!"

The three men went out, leaving Sophia in the shelter.

"Thank goodness they've made friends," thought the mother.

And she fell asleep with the pungent odour of the woods and the tar in her nostrils.

VI

The tar-workers came back, glad that the working day was over.

The sound of their voices awoke the mother, and she came out of the shelter yawning and smiling.

"You working and me sleeping like a grand lady!" she said, turning a fond look on them.

"You can be excused for that," answered Rybin. Weariness had consumed his surplus energy and left him more tranquil.

"Ignat," he said, "what about some tea? We take turns with the household tasks. Today it's Ignat's turn to give us food and drink."

"I'd be glad to change with somebody today," said Ignat as he gathered twigs and chips for the fire.

"You're not the only one who wants to be with the visitors," answered Yefim, sitting down next to Sophia.

"I'll help you, Ignat," said Yakov. He went into the shelter and brought out a loaf of bread, which he cut into pieces and placed about the table.

"Listen!" said Yefim. "Somebody's coughing. . . ."

Rybin pricked up his ears and nodded.

"It's him. The living testimony is coming," he explained to Sophia. "If I had my way I'd take him from town to town and set him up in the market-places so that all the people could hear him. He always harps on the same thing, but it's a thing everybody ought to know."

The twilight and silence deepened; people's voices grew softer. Sophia and the mother watched the men—all of them moved slowly, cumbrously, with a strange wariness. And they, in their turn, watched the women.

Out of the woods came a tall bent figure leaning on a stick. They could all hear his laboured breathing.

"Here I am," he said, and went off into a fit of coughing.

He was wearing a worn coat reaching to the ground. Thin locks of straight yellow hair hung limply from under his crushed round hat. His bony yellow face was covered with a blond beard, his lips were permanently parted, and his eyes shone feverishly from the dark pits into which they had sunk.

"I hear you've brought books?" he said to Sophia when Rybin introduced her to him.

"Yes," she said.

"Thank you—on behalf of all the people. They can't grasp the truth yet—but I who know it thank you—on their behalf."

He breathed quickly, in short, greedy gasps. His voice kept breaking off, and the bony fingers of his hands crawled over his breast in the effort to button up his coat.

"It's not good for you to be out in the woods so late. The trees make the air damp and heavy," said Sophia.

"Nothing's good for me any more," he answered, catching his breath. "Only death's good for me now."

It was painful to hear his voice, and his entire figure called forth that excessive pity which is conscious of its own futility and gives rise to morbid resentment. He took a seat on a barrel, bending his knees as if afraid they would break, and wiped his perspiring brow. His hair hung dry and lifeless.

The fire flared up, everything leaped and quivered, singed shadows scurried away into the woods, while above the fire loomed Ignat's round-cheeked face. The fire died down, there was a smell of smoke, gradually the clearing was filled with darkness and silence, tense with the effort to hear the sick man's story.

"I can still be of use to the common folk—as living testimony to a great crime. . . . Here, look at me . . . I'm only twenty-eight, but I'm dying! Ten years ago I lifted as much as twelve poods without a grunt. I was sure a strong fellow like me would live to be seventy. But I only lived ten years more—and now—it's all over. My bosses robbed me—robbed me of forty years of life—forty years!"

"That's the song he sings," said Rybin huskily.

The fire leaped up again, brighter and stronger than before, and again the shadows fled to the woods and came back to the blaze, circling about it in a soundless, hostile dance. The damp logs hissed and crackled. The leaves on the trees whispered excitedly in the current of warm air. Cheerful tongues of red and yellow flame played together, entwining, scattering showers of sparks as they rose; a blazing leaf flew into the air, and the stars in the night sky smiled down at the sparks, beckoning them upwards. . . .

"It's not my song. It's the song thousands of people sing without realizing that their misfortune is a good lesson to others. How many people, crippled by work, die of starvation. . . ." He bent double in a fit of coughing.

Yakov put a pail of kvass and a bunch of spring onions on the table.

"Come here, Savely, I've brought you some milk," he said.

Savely shook his head, but Yakov took him by the arm and led him over to the table.

"Why did you bring him here?" said Sophia to Rybin reproachfully. "He may die any moment."

"I know," agreed Rybin. "But let him talk as long as he's able. His life was sacrificed to no good purpose; let him endure a little more for a good purpose. It's all right, don't worry!"

"You seem to take pleasure in it!" exclaimed Sophia.

Rybin glanced at her and replied sullenly:

"It's you gentlefolk who take pleasure admiring Jesus Christ groaning on the cross. But we want to take a lesson from this man and want you to take it too."

The mother raised one eyebrow anxiously.

"That's enough," she said.

The sick man, now sitting at the table, began to talk again.

"Why should they kill people with work? Why should they rob a man of his life? Our boss—I worked at the Nefedov factory—our boss gave an actress a golden basin to wash herself in, and a golden bed-pot. My strength and my life went into that pot! That's what I gave my life for! A man killed me with work so that he could amuse his mistress with my life's blood! He bought her a golden bed-pot with my life's blood!"

"Man's made in the image and likeness of God," scoffed Yefim, "and here's what they do to him."

"Tell everybody about it!" cried Rybin, bringing his palm down on the table.

"Don't stand for it!" added Yakov softly.

Ignat gave a laugh. The mother noticed that these three boys listened with the insatiable curiosity of hungry souls, watching Rybin intently whenever he spoke. The words of Savely brought a strange expression of mockery to their faces. They seemed to feel no pity for the sick man.

"Is it really true what he says?" whispered the mother softly, leaning towards Sophia.

"Yes, it's true," answered Sophia in a loud voice. "They even wrote about those gifts in the Moscow papers."

"But the criminal is never punished," said Rybin huskily. "And he should be—he ought to be brought before the people and chopped to bits, and his rotten flesh thrown to the dogs! Oh, it's a great punishment the people will mete out once they rise up! They'll shed a lot of blood to wash away the wrongs they've suffered! And it will be their own blood, drained out of their own veins, so they'll have a right to do whatever they want with it!"

"I'm cold," said the sick man.

Yakov helped him rise and led him to the fire.

Now the fire was burning brightly and vague shadows danced about it, evidently watching the cheerful play of the flames. Savely sat down on a stump and stretched his dry, transparent hands towards the heat.

"He makes it clearer than books," he said to Sophia, nodding towards the sick man. "When a machine kills a worker or chops off an arm, they say it was his own fault. But when they suck all the blood out of a fellow and throw him away like garbage, there's no explaining it. I can understand outright murder, but I can't understand torturing a fellow to death just for the fun of it. Why do they torture the people? Why do they torture all of us? Just for the fun of it, for the sake of their own pleasure, so that they can enjoy themselves on this earth—buy whatever they want at the price of human blood: actresses, race horses, silver knives, golden dishes, expensive toys for their children. 'Work!' says the boss. 'Work harder and harder so that I can pile up money from your labour to buy my mistress a golden piss-pot!'"

As the mother watched and listened, the bright path chosen by Pavel and his comrades seemed to shine in the darkness of the night.

When supper was over they all went to sit around the fire. The flames licked greedily at the logs; behind them rose a curtain of darkness, screening woods and sky. The sick man sat staring into the fire with wide open eyes. He coughed constantly and shivered as though the remnants of his life were impatiently struggling to free themselves from a body wasted by illness. The light of the flames played on his face without animating the lifeless skin. Only his eyes burned with a moribund fire.

"Hadn't you better go into the shelter, Savely?" said Yakov, bending over him.

"Why?" asked the sick man with an effort. "I'll stay here—I haven't much longer to be with people."

He looked about him, and after a short pause said with a wan smile, "It's good to be with you. When I look at you I hope you will avenge those who have been robbed and killed by greed."

No one answered him, and soon he fell asleep, his head dropping lifelessly on his chest.

"Comes and sits here and always talks about the same thing: this terrible skin-game," said Rybin softly as he watched him. "His whole soul's full of it. Can't see anything else—as if it was pasted over his eyes."

"What else should he see?" said the mother thoughtfully. "If thousands of people are being killed by work day after day so that their bosses can throw away money on all kinds of nonsense, what else is there to see?"

"It's boring to listen to him," said Ignat. "If you hear it once you can't forget it, but he keeps playing the same tune over and over."

"Everything's crammed into this tune, all of life," observed Rybin sombrely. "Got to understand that. I've heard his story a dozen times, and even so I sometimes have my doubts. There are good moments when you don't want to believe people are rotten and stupid, when you like everybody, rich and poor alike—the rich, too, have been led astray! Some are blind from need, others blind from greed. That's what! 'Ah, my good people!' you think, 'My brothers all! Shake yourselves, think honestly, think without sparing yourselves!'"

The sick man swayed, opened his eyes, and lay down on the ground. Yakov silently got up and went into the shelter, and soon he came back with a sheepskin which he wrapped round his cousin; then he sat down next to Sophia again.

The frolicsome smile of the fire lighted up the dark figures around it, while the voices of the people merged contemplatively with the quiet crackle and rustle of the flames.

Sophia told them about the struggle of the peoples of the whole world for their right to life, about the German peasant uprisings of long ago, the misery of the Irish, and the heroism of French workers in their frequent battles for freedom. . . .

Here in the woods clad in the velvet of night, in this little clearing walled in by trees, canopied by the dark sky, lighted by the fire, encircled by wondering, hostile shadows, a tale was told of events which had shaken the world belonging to the mean and well-fed. The names of fighters for truth and freedom were mentioned, and one by one the peoples of the earth filed past, weary and bloody from battle.

The woman's voice was low and husky. It seemed to come out of the past, raising the hopes and inspiring the confidence of these men, who listened in silence to this tale of their brothers in other lands. As they gazed into Sophia's pale thin face they had a clearer understanding of the sacred cause of all the peoples of the world: the endless struggle for freedom. They found that their own dreams and aspirations had been those of unknown races living in the distant past, separated from the present by the dark and bloody curtain of history. With their hearts and minds they made contact with the vast world, finding therein friends who were united in their firm resolve to establish justice on the earth, sanctifying this resolve with the suffering they endured and the blood they shed for the sake of a better life. A new sense of spiritual affinity with all peoples was kindled, and a new heart was born to the world—a heart pulsing with the ardent desire to know everything, to comprehend everything.

"The day will come when the workers of all countries will rise up and say, 'Enough! We have had our fill of such a life!'" said Sophia confidently. "Then the unsubstantial power of those who are strong only in their own greed will crumble, the earth will slip from under their feet and they will be left with nothing to cling to."

"True," said Rybin, bending his head. "There's nothing we can't do if we give all we have, unsparing of ourselves."

The mother listened with a lift of her brows and a smile of happy surprise on her lips. She saw that what had seemed too abrupt and too loud and too wide-sweeping in Sophia—everything unsuited to her nature—had disappeared in the eager, even flow of her story. She liked the quietness of the night, the play of the fire, Sophia's face—but most of all she liked the solemn attention of the muzhiks. They sat motionless, trying not to interrupt the steady unfolding of the tale, afraid to break off the bright thread tying them up with the whole world. From time to time one of them would carefully place fresh logs on the fire, and would wave his hand to defend the women from the shower of sparks and clouds of smoke that rose from it.

Once Yakov got up and said quietly, "Just a minute."

He ran into the shelter and brought out some wraps which he and Ignat silently placed on the shoulders and over the knees of their guests. Then Sophia went on speaking, drawing a picture of the day of victory, inspiring her hearers with faith in their own strength, arousing in them a consciousness of their oneness with all those who were pouring out their lives in futile labour to satisfy the foolish caprices of the over-sated. The mother was not agitated by Sophia's words, but the sense of brotherhood they induced filled her with devout gratitude to people who, at the risk of their lives, brought the gifts of love and truth and honest thinking to those enchained by daily labour.

"God help them," she thought, closing her eyes.

At dawn the weary Sophia ended her tale and glanced, smiling, at the bright and thoughtful faces about her.

"Time for us to be going," said the mother.

"Yes, it is," answered Sophia.

One of the boys gave a deep sigh.

"Too bad you have to leave," said Rybin in an unusually mild tone. "It's good to listen to you. It's a great thing to make people feel their oneness. When you know that millions want the same thing you do, it makes your heart feel kinder. And kindness is a mighty force!"

"Be kind so that the other fellow can boot your behind!" laughed Yefim quietly as he got up. "They better be going before anyone sees them, Uncle Mikhailo. Soon as we start handing out those leaflets the authorities will look for the people who brought them. Somebody will say, 'Remember those pilgrims who came here?'"

"Thank you for your trouble, mother," interrupted Rybin. "I keep thinking of Pavel when I look at you. What good work you're doing!"

Now he was in a gentler mood and smiled a broad, warm smile. The air was chilly, but he stood there without any coat on and with his shirt still open, baring his chest. The mother couldn't help admiring his strong physique.

"You'd better put something round you," she said gently. "It's cold."

"It's warm inside of me," he answered.

The three boys talked quietly at the fire, while the sick man lay at their feet covered with the sheepskin. The sky paled, the shadows dissolved, the leaves quivered in anticipation of the rising sun.

"Well, I guess it's good-bye," said Rybin, holding out his hand to Sophia. "How can we find you in town?"

"It's me you're to find," said the mother.

The three boys came up to Sophia slowly and shook her hand with clumsy politeness. It was clear that each of them was experiencing a secret pleasure, fine and friendly, and this feeling seemed to embarrass them by its novelty. They shifted from foot to foot and smiled at her with eyes that smarted from lack of sleep.

"Won't you have a drink of milk before setting out?". asked Yakov.

"Is there any?" put in Yefim.

"No," said Ignat, smoothing back his hair uneasily. "I spilled it."

The three boys laughed.

They spoke of milk, but the mother sensed that they were thinking of something else—that they were full of good will towards her and Sophia and were wishing them well. Sophia felt this too, and it filled her with confusion and humility, so that she could only say, "Thank you, comrades."

The boys exchanged glances, as if her words had given them a little push.

The sick man gave a racking cough. The coals stopped glowing where the fire had been.

"Good-bye," said the muzhiks quietly, and the mournful word sounded on in the women's ears.

They went unhurriedly down the woodland path in the pale light preceding dawn.

"How wonderful it was," said the mother, who was walking behind Sophia. "As wonderful as a dream. People want to know the truth, my dear; indeed they do. It's like in church, before morning mass on Christmas or Easter: the priest hasn't come yet, everything is dark and quiet and eery, but little by little the people gather. Here a candle is lighted in front of an icon, there another, and gradually the darkness is driven away and God's house is filled with light."

"How true!" said Sophia joyfully. "Only here, God's house is the whole world!"

"The whole world!" repeated the mother thoughtfully, nodding her head. "That's almost too good to be true. And you spoke so well, my dear—so very well! And I was afraid they wouldn't like you."

Sophia was silent a moment.

"Being with them makes a person simpler," she said at last, quietly and sombrely.

They continued on their way, talking about Rybin, the sick man, the boys who had been so attentively silent and embarrassed, but who eloquently expressed their gratitude in little services. Soon they reached the fields, and the sun rose to meet them. While still out of sight, it spread its transparent fan of rosy rays across the sky, and the dew-drops on the grass sparkled with multi-coloured glints of buoyant spring joy. The birds awoke, enlivening the morning with their cheerful song. Fat crows, cawing busily, flew by with a heavy sweep of wings. An oriole whistled. Distant spaces opened up, greeting the rising sun by lifting the veils of night from the hills.

"Sometimes a person talks on and on and you can't understand him until he says some simple word that suddenly makes everything clear," said the mother meditatively. "That's how it was with that sick man. I've heard a lot, and I myself know a lot about how they drive the workers at factories and other places. But you get so used to it, it hardly touches you. But what he said was so awful! So shameful! Dear Jesus! Can it be that people pour out their lives just so that their bosses can allow themselves such a mockery? There can't be any justice in that!"

The mother's thoughts settled on this man's case, which cast a sardonic reflection on similar cases she had heard of, but forgotten.

"They're sick with gorging themselves. I once knew a country official who made all the muzhiks bow down to his horse whenever it passed through the village, and arrested anyone who didn't. What made him do such a thing? There's no explaining it."

Softly Sophia began to sing a song as bright and fresh as the morning. . . .

VII

The mother's life flowed on with a strange serenity. Sometimes this serenity amazed her. Her son was in jail and she knew he would receive a cruel sentence, yet every time she thought of this, her mind was filled with visions of Andrei and Feodor and others. The image of her son, comprising all those who shared his fate, grew in her eyes, giving rise to thoughts of him that imperceptibly branched out in all directions. Like thin, groping rays they reached everywhere and touched everything in an effort to throw light on all phenomena and relate all things in a single pattern. They kept her mind from dwelling on any one thing, especially on her longing for her son and her fears for him.

Soon Sophia went away, returning five days later in a lively, cheerful mood, only to disappear again within a few hours and reappear within another two weeks. It seemed as though she travelled through life in wide circles which from time to time brought her back to her brother, that she might fill his flat with her courage and music.

The mother came to love music. As she listened, it seemed to her that warm waves were beating against her breast and laving her heart, making it pulsate more evenly and give off strong shoots of thought which, like well-watered seeds deeply buried in the earth, easily and beautifully blossomed into words under the influence of the music.

It was difficult for the mother to put up with Sophia's untidiness: the flat was always littered with her clothes, cigarettes and ashes. It was even more difficult to reconcile herself to Sophia's impassioned speeches, which formed such a striking contrast to Nikolai's quiet self-assurance and the gentle seriousness with which he always spoke. Sophia seemed to her to be an adolescent who was eager to be considered a grown-up and looked upon people as curious toys. She kept talking about the sacredness of labour, yet was forever adding to the mother's work by her untidiness; she spoke eloquently of freedom, yet the mother could see that she kept oppressing others with her intolerance and endless arguments. She was full of contradictions, and, realizing this, the mother always approached her guardedly, and did not feel for her the same unchanging cordiality which she felt for Nikolai.

He was always filled with concern for others as he went on living his monotonous life from day to day: at eight o'clock he had his morning tea, when he read the paper and told the mother the news. As she listened to him, she perceived with startling clarity how mercilessly the machine of life ground people into money. She found that Nikolai had much in common with Andrei. Like the *khokhol*, he spoke of people without malice, blaming all of them for the wrongs in the world, but his faith in the new life was not so ardent as Andrei's, and not so picturesque. He always spoke in the calm voice of a stern and honest judge, and while a quiet smile of regret played about his lips when discussing the most dreadful things, his eyes had a hard, cold glint in them.

Seeing this, the mother realized he would never forgive anyone anything—that he *could* not forgive—and she felt sorry for him, for she knew it was not easy for him to be hard. Her fondness for him grew with every day.

At nine o'clock he went to work. When he was gone she would tidy up the flat, get dinner, wash herself, put on a clean dress and sit in her room looking at the illustrations in books. She had by this time learned to read, but it required such great effort that she quickly tired and could not grasp the relation of one word to another. But she took a childlike pleasure in looking at pictures. They revealed to her a new and wonderful world which she understood, and which she found almost tangible. Before her rose huge cities, beautiful buildings, machines, ships, monuments, the inestimable wealth created by the hands of men, and the manifold gifts of nature, whose variety was stunning. Life kept endlessly expanding, opening her eyes to one wonder after another, exciting her thirsting soul by an exhibition of its lavish treasures, its inexhaustible beauty. She was particularly fond of poring over the zoological atlas, which, while printed in a foreign language, nevertheless gave her a vivid conception of the wealth and beauty and vastness of the earth.

"How large the world is!" she remarked to Nikolai one day.

She was most delighted with the insects, especially the butterflies. Wonderingly she studied the drawings.

"Aren't they lovely, Nikolai Ivanovich?" she said. "How much of this loveliness there is everywhere—all unknown to us, flying past unseen. People rush about, knowing nothing, seeing nothing—no time for it, and no desire. How much joy we would have if we knew about the riches of the earth and how many wonderful things live on it. And everything is for everybody, and each thing is for all—isn't that so?"

"Indeed it is," smiled Nikolai as he brought her another illustrated book.

People often came to see him in the evenings. Among his guests were: Alexei Vasilyevich, a handsome man with a pale face and a black beard—very imposing and taciturn; Roman Petrovich, a pimply, round-headed person who was always clucking regretfully over something or other; Ivan Danilovich, a small, thin man with a pointed beard and a high voice—quick and noisy and sharp as a stiletto; Yegor, who was always laughing at himself, his comrades, and the illness which kept getting worse. There were other people too, who came from distant towns. Nikolai held long quiet talks with them, always on the same subject—the working people of the world. They would argue excitedly, waving their hands and drinking great quantities of tea. Sometimes while they talked Nikolai would compose proclamations which he would then read to his comrades. They would instantly copy them and the mother would carefully gather up the pieces of torn drafts and burn them.

As she poured tea for them she would wonder at the fervour with which they talked about the life and fate of the working people, about the best and the quickest means of spreading the truth among them and of rallying their spirits. Often they would grow angry as they argued and hurl offensive accusations at one another but go right on arguing.

The mother felt that she knew the life of the workers better than they. It seemed to her that she saw more clearly the enormousness of the task they had undertaken, and this enabled her to regard them with a certain condescension, with the sadness of a grown-up watching children play at husband-and-wife without comprehending the drama of the relationship. Involuntarily she compared their speeches with those of her son and Andrei, and she was conscious of a difference which at first she could not understand. At times she felt that the people here shouted more than the people in the workers' settlement.

"They know more, so they shout more," was how she explained it.

But too often she had a feeling that these people were intentionally stirring each other up and making a show of their ardour, as though each wanted to prove to his comrades that the truth meant more to him than to them; some were offended by this, and would use crude, cutting arguments to prove in their turn that *they* had more regard for the truth. Each of them seemed eager to leap higher than the others, and this troubled and saddened her.

"They've forgotten all about Pasha and his comrades," she would think as she gazed at them with quivering brows and pleading eyes.

She listened to all their arguments with the greatest attention, though of course she did not understand them. But she tried to catch the feeling behind the words, and it became clear to her that when the concept of goodness was discussed in the workers' settlement, it was accepted in round terms, as something whole, while here it was broken into bits; there, feelings were deeper and stronger; here, they were chopped up by keen thinking. Here, they spoke more about the tearing down of the old; there, they dreamed more of the new, and for this reason the words of her son and Andrei were dearer and more comprehensible to her.

She noticed that whenever a worker came to see Nikolai, his manner was too free and easy; a sugary expression appeared on his face and he spoke in an unaccustomed way—more crudely, perhaps, or more offhandedly.

"He's trying to speak so that the man will understand him," she thought.

But this did not satisfy her. She saw that the worker, too, was uncomfortable, all tight inside, so that he could not speak as freely and easily with Nikolai as he did with her, a simple workingwoman. Once, when Nikolai went out of the room, she said to a young fellow who had come:

"What are you afraid of? You're not a schoolboy reciting lessons to his teacher."

The worker gave a broad grin.

"Even lobsters get red when they're out of their element . . . after all, he's not the likes of us."

Sometimes Sasha came. She never stayed long, always spoke in a matter-of-fact way, without laughing, and on leaving she would invariably say to the mother:

"How is Pavel Mikhailovich?"

"He's all right—keeping cheerful, thank the Lord!"

"Give him my regards," the girl would say, and disappear.

Once the mother complained to her that they were keeping Pavel so long without holding the trial. Sasha frowned and said nothing, but her fingers twitched.

The mother longed to say to her, "I know you love him, my dear." But she lacked the courage. The girl's solemn face, her compressed lips and the dry matter-of-factness of her words repelled any affectionate impulse. With a sigh the mother silently pressed the hand held out to her.

"Ah me, how unhappy you are!" she thought.

One day Natasha came. She was delighted to find the mother here.

"My mother died, the poor darling," she said suddenly, after she had kissed her. She tossed her head and touched her eyes with a quick movement before she went on, "Such a pity!

She wasn't even fifty years old. She could have lived much longer. But on the other hand, I can't help thinking that death was preferable to the life she led. She was always alone, nobody loved her, nobody needed her, and she was constantly terrorized by my father's shouts. Do you call that living? Other people live in the hope of something better, but there was nothing my mother could look forward to but further insults."

"It's true what you say, Natasha," said the mother musingly. "People live in the hope of something better, but if there's nothing to look forward to, what kind of a life is it?" She patted the girl's hand. "So now you're all alone?"

"All alone," said Natasha lightly.

"That's all right," smiled the mother after a brief pause. "Good people never live alone very long—they always have others hitching on to them."

VIII

Natasha began to teach in a school attached to a weaving mill, and the mother supplied her with illegal pamphlets, proclamations and newspapers.

This became her work. Several times a month she disguised herself as a nun, or a peddler of laces and homespun, a well-to-do townswoman or a pious pilgrim, and wandered through the province with a bag over her shoulder or a suitcase in her hand. In trains, on boats, in hotels and inns, she was ever the same sedate, simple person who spoke the first word to strangers, fearlessly drawing attention to herself by her sociability and the self-assurance of a person who has seen a lot in her time.

She liked to talk to people, to hear their stories and complaints and discover what puzzled them. It always made her happy to meet a person who was deeply dissatisfied, and whose dissatisfaction, while protesting against the blows of fate, persistently sought an answer to clearly-defined questions. Before her unrolled the panorama of human life with its restless, anxious struggle for the daily bread. On every hand she saw brazenly-frank, shockingly-open efforts to cheat people, to do them out of something, to drink their blood and squeeze the last drop of profit out of them. She saw that there was an abundance of everything on the earth, yet the masses lived in dire need, half-starved in the midst of plenty. The churhes in the towns were filled with silver and gold for which God had no use, while at the gates beggars stood shivering, waiting in vain for a few coppers to be dropped into their outstretched hands. She had seen all this before—the rich churches and the gold-brocaded vestments of the priests, the hovels of the poor and their shameful rags. But then she had accepted it as a natural state of affairs, while now she found it intolerable and an insult to the poor who, as she knew, were closer to the church and had more need of it than the rich.

From pictures of Christ which she had seen, and from the stories about Him which she had heard, she knew that He dressed simply and was a friend of the poor. But in the churches she saw His image adorned in flagrant gold and silk which rustled squeamishly at sight of the poor, who came to Him for comfort. And involuntarily she remembered the words of Rybin:

"They've fooled us about God too!"

Quite unconsciously she began to pray less, but to think more about Christ and about the people who, without ever mentioning His name, without seeming to know about Him, lived, or so she thought, according to His precepts and in His manner, seeing the earth as the kingdom of the poor and striving to divide its riches equally among all. She thought a great deal about this, and her thoughts grew, taking deep root, and branching out to embrace all that she saw and all that she heard. They grew and assumed the brightness of a prayer, illumining with their steady glow the entire dark world, the whole of life and all of the people. And she felt that Christ Himself, whom she had always loved with a vague tenderness—a mixed emotion in which fear was closely bound up with hope, and joy with sorrow—had become dearer to her. And He had changed, had grown more exalted and accessible, more bright and joyous, as though in actual fact He had become resurrected for life, washed in the blood so generously shed in His name by people who modestly refrained from speaking this name, the name of the Friend of Man. After each of her trips she returned to Nikolai happy and excited from all that she had seen and heard on the road, and pleased with having fulfilled her duty.

"It's good to travel about like this and see so much," she said to him one evening. "It makes you understand life. The common folk are pushed away, swept off to the very edge of life, where they cringe in darkness, asking themselves why. Why should they be driven away? Why should they go hungry when there is so much food? Why should they be ignorant when there is so much learning? And where is He, the merciful God, for whom there are neither rich nor poor, but only His beloved children? The people get stirred up when they think of their lives; they feel that injustice will wipe them out if they don't do something about it."

More and more often she felt that she herself must speak to the people about the injustice of their lives; sometimes she had difficulty in suppressing this urge.

Whenever Nikolai found her poring over her pictures he would smile and tell her about some marvel of the world. She was awed by the boldness of the tasks man set himself.

"Is such a thing possible?" she would ask dubiously.

With persistent, unwavering faith in the truth of his prophecies, he would look at her kindly through his glasses and tell her tales of the future.

"The desires of man are beyond measure and his strength is inexhaustible. But the world is very slow to enrich itself spiritually, because now everyone who wishes to become independent must store up money instead of knowledge. But when people do away with greed and enforced labour. . . ."

She rarely grasped the meaning of his words, but little by little came to understand the calm faith that inspired them.

"There are not enough free people on the earth—that's the trouble!" he said.

She could understand this. She was acquainted with people who had emancipated themselves from greed and malice, and she knew that if there were more such people, life would no longer be so dark and terrible; it would become simpler, brighter, and nobler.

"People are forced to be cruel," said Nikolai sadly.

She nodded in assent, remembering the words of the *khokhol*.

IX

One day Nikolai, who was always extremely punctual, came home from work later than usual.

"One of our comrades escaped from jail today, Nilovna. Who could it be? I wasn't able to find out," he said, nervously rubbing his hands without taking off his coat.

The mother swayed.

"Could it be Pavel?" she whispered, sitting down.

"It could," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "But how can we help him hide? How shall we find him? I just wandered up and down the streets in the hope of coming upon him. That was silly, of course, but we must do something. I'm going out again. . . ."

"So am I!" cried the mother.

"You might go to Yegor's and find out whether he knows anything," suggested Nikolai as he hurried out.

She threw a kerchief over her head and rushed down the street behind him, filled with hope. Red spots danced before her eyes, and the pounding of her heart made her almost run. With lowered head, oblivious of everything about her, she went to meet a possibility.

"What if I should find him there!" was the hope that goaded her on.

It was hot, and she panted with exhaustion. When she reached the stairs to Yegor's apartment she could go no further. She stopped, turned round, suddenly gave a little cry and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that she had seen Nikolai Vesovshchikov standing with his hands in his pockets at the gate of the house. But when she looked again there was nobody there.

"I just imagined it," she thought, climbing the stairs and listening. In the yard she could hear someone's slow steps. She stopped on the landing and looked down. Again she saw the pock-marked face, now smiling at her.

"Nikolai! Nikolai!" she cried, rushing down to meet him, her heart aching with disappointment.

"Go back," he said quietly, waving his hand.

Quickly she mounted the stairs and entered Yegor's room, where she found him lying on the couch.

"Nikolai—has escaped—from jail!" she gasped.

"Which Nikolai?" asked Yegor hoarsely, raising his head off the pillow. "There are two of them."

"Vesovshchikov. He's coming here!"

"Good!"

At this moment Nikolai himself entered the room. He hooked the door behind him and took off his cap, standing there chuckling and patting down his hair. Yegor raised himself on his elbows.

"Welcome," he said with a nod.

Nikolai came over to the mother with a grin and took her hand.

"If I hadn't met you, I might as well've gone back to jail. I don't know anybody in town and they'd pick me up in a minute if I went back to the settlement. So I kept walking the streets and thinking what a fool I was to have escaped. Suddenly I see Pelagea Nilovna hurrying along, and off I go after her."

"How did you get out?" asked the mother.

He sat down uneasily on the edge of the couch and shrugged his shoulders.

"Just chance," he said. "I was out having my airing when the common criminals began beating their guard. This guard was once kicked out of the gendarmerie for stealing—now he spies on everybody and squeals and doesn't give anybody any peace. So there they were giving him a beating. Everything topsy-turvy, with guards running about blowing their whistles. I look up and see that the gates are open, and out there the square and the town. I walk over slowly, like in a dream, and when I'm already a good ways down the street I come to my senses and think, where shall I go? When I looked back, the gates were closed already."

"Hm," said Yegor. "Why didn't you go back, knock politely and ask them to take you in—'I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but I made a little mistake.'"

"Yes," laughed Nikolai, "that's silly, but somehow it *didn't* seem right to my comrades, going off like that without saying anything to anybody. But I keep going. I met a funeral procession—burying a baby—and joined it, walking after the coffin with my head down and not looking at anybody. Then I sat for a while in the cemetery taking the air, and suddenly a thought struck me. . . ."

"Only one?" asked Yegor, adding with a sigh, "I don't suppose it felt very crowded in that head of yours."

Vesovshchikov laughed good-naturedly and shook his head.

"Oh it's not so empty now as it used to be! But I see you're still ailing, Yegor Ivanovich."

"Everyone does what he's able," answered Yegor with a phlegmy cough. "Go on with your story."

"I dropped into the local museum. I walked about and looked at the things, thinking to myself: where shall I go next? I was mad at myself. And hungry as a bear. I went out and walked down the street feeling pretty low. The police were looking close at everybody. Well, thinks I, with a mug like mine I'll soon be dragged before the judge. Then all of a sudden Pelagea Nilovna comes hurrying towards me. I step aside and follow her. That's all."

"I didn't see you," said the mother guiltily. On closer scrutiny, she found that Vesovshchikov had grown thinner.

"The comrades'll be worried," said Vesovshchikov, scratching his head.

"And what about the authorities? Don't you pity them? They'll also be worried," observed Yegor. He opened his mouth and began to work his lips as though he were chew-ing air. "But all joking aside, we've got to hide you away somewhere, which won't be easy, though very pleasant. If only I could get up!" He gasped, dropped his hands on his chest and began to rub it weakly.

"You're looking mighty sick, Yegor Ivanovich," said Nikolai, dropping his head. The mother sighed and glanced anxiously about the crowded little room.

"That's my own business," answered Yegor. "Ask him about Pavel, mother, without putting on any more airs."

Vesovshchikov grinned.

"Pavel's all right. He's well. He's sort of our chief in there. It's him who talks to the heads and in general takes command. Everybody thinks a lot of him."

Pelagea nodded her head as she listened to Vesovshchikov and glanced out of the corner of her eye at Yegor's puffy bluish face. It seemed strangely flat and immobile and expressionless. But his eyes were lively and cheerful.

"If you could give me something to eat—I'm that hungry!" exclaimed Nikolai suddenly.

"There's some bread up there on the shelf, mother," said Yegor. "Then go out into the hall and knock at the second door on the left. A woman will open it and you tell her to come here and bring with her all the victuals she can find."

"Why so much?" protested Nikolai.

"Don't worry, it won't be much."

The mother went out and knocked at the door. As she waited, she thought of Yegor.

"He's dying. . . ."

"Who's there?" asked someone in the room.

"I've come from Yegor Ivanovich," answered the mother quietly. "He asks you to come to his room."

"Right away," the woman answered without opening the door. The mother waited a moment and then knocked again. The door was opened quickly and a tall woman in glasses came out into the hall and stood there hurriedly smoothing out the wrinkles in her sleeves.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly.

"Yegor Ivanovich sent me."

"Come along. But I think I know you, don't I?" exclaimed the woman softly. "How do you do? It's dark here."

The mother glanced at her and remembered having seen her a few times at Nikolai's.

"They're all our people," she thought.

The woman had Pelagea walk ahead of her.

"Is he feeling bad?" she asked.

"Yes, he's lying down. He told me to ask you to bring something to eat."

"That's not necessary."

As they entered Yegor's room they could hear his raucous breathing.

"I'm leaving to join my ancestors, friend. . . . Ah, Ludmilla Vasilyevna! This young man has had the impudence to walk out of jail without the permission of the authorities. First of all, give him something to eat, and then stow him away somewhere."

The woman nodded and threw a quick glance at the sick man.

"You should have sent for me as soon as they came, Yegor," she said. "And I see you have missed your medicine twice. Shame on you! Follow me, comrade. They're coming to take Yegor to the hospital any minute."

"So you really intend to put me in the hospital?"

"Yes. I shall stay there with you."

"You too? Good Lord!"

"None of your nonsense!"

As she talked, the woman pulled the blanket up over

Yegor's chest, carefully studied Nikolai, and held up the bottles to see how much medicine was left. She spoke in an even, modulated voice, and moved gracefully. Her face was pale and her dark brows nearly met at the bridge of her nose. The mother did not like her face. She found it too haughty. The woman's eyes never smiled or sparkled, and she spoke in a tone of command.

"We'll leave you now," she went on, "but I'll be back soon. Give Yegor a tablespoonful of this medicine. And don't let him talk."

She went out, taking Nikolai with her.

"A splendid woman," said Yegor with a sigh. "A simply marvellous woman. I must fix you up with her, mother, she gets so worn out. . . ."

"You mustn't talk. Take this medicine instead," said the mother gently.

He took the medicine and closed one eye.

"I'll die anyway, even if I keep my mouth shut," he said.

He watched the mother with his other eye, while his lips slowly parted in a smile. The mother bent her head, and a sharp pang of pity brought tears to her eyes.

"That's all right—it's only natural," he said. "The pleasure of living entails the necessity of dying."

The mother placed her hand on his brow.

"Can't you possibly keep still?" she said softly.

He closed his eyes as though listening to the rattle in his chest.

"There's no sense in keeping still, mother," he went on perversely. "What can I gain by it? Some extra seconds of dying, while I forfeit the pleasure of having a few words with a nice woman like you. I'm sure the people in the other world can't be as nice as those here."

"That fine lady will come back here and scold me for letting you talk," interrupted the mother anxiously.

"She's no fine lady. She's a revolutionary, comrade, and a wonderful woman. Of course she'll scold you. She scolds everybody."

With obvious effort, Yegor began to tell her the story of his neighbour's life. There was a twinkle in his eye and the mother realized he had been teasing her.

"He's dying," she thought as she looked into his moist, discoloured face.

Ludmilla came back, carefully closed the door behind her, and turned to the mother.

"Your friend must change his clothes and leave my room as soon as possible, so you must go and get some things for him to wear. Bring them here. Too bad Sophia is away—that's her speciality, hiding people."

"She's coming tomorrow," said the mother as she threw her shawl over her shoulders.

Whenever she was given some task she was so eager to perform it quickly and well that she could think of nothing else.

"How do you think he should be dressed?" she now asked in a businesslike tone, knitting her brows.

"It doesn't matter. He'll leave at night."

"Night's worse—fewer people on the streets, and the police more watchful. He isn't a very sly one, you know."

Yegor laughed huskily.

"Can I come to the hospital to see you?" asked the mother.

He nodded and coughed.

"Would you like to take turns with me at his bedside?" asked Ludmilla, glancing at the mother with her dark eyes. "You would? Very well. But now be off as fast as you can."

She took the mother affectionately but imperiously by the arm and led her to the door.

"Don't be offended by my putting you out this way," she said when they were outside, "but he mustn't talk. I still have hope."

She gripped her hands until the bones cracked, and closed her eyes wearily. Her confession embarrassed the mother.

"Dear me, what are you saying?" she murmured.

"Be sure there are no spies about!" said the woman in a low voice, raising her hands to her temples and rubbing them. Her lips quivered and the expression of her face softened.

"I know all about them!" said the mother, not without pride.

When she had passed through the gate, she stopped for a moment and arranged her shawl, glancing about quickly as she did so. She rarely made a mistake when it came to spotting plain-clothesmen in a crowd; she knew only too well the exaggerated nonchalance of their walk, the unnatural ease of their gestures, the expression of weariness and boredom which ill disguised the guilty, guarded look in their shifty eyes.

Not seeing anyone of this sort, she hurried down the street and hailed a droshky, telling the man to drive her to the market. As she selected a coat for Nikolai she wrangled over the price and railed at a fictitious husband who was such a drunkard that she was always having to buy him new clothes. Her invention had little effect on the tradesmen, but she herself was highly pleased by it, for in the droshky she had decided that the police, knowing Nikolai would have to be outfitted, would be sure to send spies to the market. With the same caution she made her way back to Yegor's flat, and then she had to see Nikolai to the edge of town.

They walked on different sides of the street, and the mother was pleased and amused to see Nikolai plodding along with lowered head, the skirts of his long brown coat catching between his legs, his hat forever slipping down over his nose. In a deserted by-street they were met by Sasha; the mother nodded to Vesovshchikov and turned back home.

"But Pavel's still in jail . . . and Andrei . . ." she thought sadly.

X

Nikolai met her in a state of great excitement.

"Yegor is in a bad way!" he exclaimed. "In a very bad way! They have taken him to the hospital. Ludmilla was here and wants you to come. . . ."

"To the hospital?"

Nikolai gave his glasses a nervous little push and helped the mother put on her jacket.

"Here, take this package with you," he said in a trembling voice as he pressed her fingers in his warm, dry hand. "Is Vesovshchikov all right?"

"Yes."

"I shall come to see Yegor."

The mother was worn out, and Nikolai's excitement gave her a presentiment of disaster.

"He's dying," was the thought that kept throbbing in her mind.

But she felt relieved when she stepped into the bright clean little room where Yegor was lying propped up on a mound of white pillows, laughing hoarsely. She stayed near the door and listened to what he was saying to the doctor.

"Doctoring the sick is like passing reforms."

"Do be serious, Yegor!" said the doctor in a worried tone.

"But I'm a revolutionary and so I hate reforms."

The doctor gently placed Yegor's hand back on the cover and stood up, thoughtfully stroking his beard while he felt the puffiness of his patient's face.

The mother knew the doctor—he was one of Nikolai's closest friends and his name was Ivan Danilovich. She went over to Yegor, who greeted her by sticking out his tongue. The doctor turned round.

"Ah, Nilovna! Hullo! What's that you have in your hand?"

"Books, I suppose," put in Yegor.

"He mustn't read," said the little doctor.

"He wants to turn me into an idiot!" complained the patient.

A bubbling and wheezing sound came from inside his chest as he breathed in short gasps. His face was covered with tiny drops of perspiration, and it cost him great effort to lift his hand to wipe his brow. The strange immobility of his puffy cheeks turned his broad kind face into a lifeless mask. Only his eyes, deep-sunk in swelling, looked out with a clear, condescending smile.

"Hey you, Aesculapius, I'm tired. May I lie down?"

"No, you may not," answered the doctor curtly.

"Well, I will, the minute you go out!"

"Don't let him, Nilovna! Fluff up his pillows. And please don't let him talk, it's very harmful."

The mother nodded and the doctor went out with short, quick steps. Yegor threw back his head, closed his eyes, and became motionless except for the twitching of his fingers. The white walls of the little room were cold and depressing. Through the large window could be seen the curly tops of the limes, with spots of yellow among their dark, dusty leaves—the chill touch of autumn.

"Death is claiming me slowly and reluctantly," said

Yegor without opening his eyes. "She seems to feel sorry for me—I was always so easy to get on with!"

"Do stop talking, Yegor Ivanovich," begged the mother as she gently stroked his hand.

"I will—soon—"

With a great effort he went on, gasping for breath and interrupting himself with long pauses.

"It's splendid that you're with us—so pleasant to see your face. I sometimes wonder . . . what will happen to you. It's a pity to think that you—like all the rest—must go to jail . . . and all that. . . . Are you afraid of going to jail?"

"No," she answered simply.

"Of course not. But still . . . jail's beastly. It's jail did this to me. To tell the truth—I don't want to die. . . ."

The mother was about to say, "Maybe you won't," but a glance at his face made her change her mind.

"I could still work. . . . If I was unable to work—there would be no point in living—no sense. . . ."

The mother sighed and recalled Andrei's favourite expression: "True, but not very comforting." She had had an exhausting day and was hungry. The monotonous whispering of the sick man filled the room and crawled feebly over the smooth walls; the tops of the limes outside the window were like low-hanging clouds, startlingly dark and sorrowful. All things were strangely still in the immobility of twilight, in the dismal anticipation of night.

"How bad I feel!" said Yegor, closing his eyes and growing silent.

"Go to sleep," said the mother. "Maybe you'll feel better."

She listened to his breathing, glanced about, and sat without moving for a few minutes, in the cold grip of grief; then she dozed off.

She was awakened by a muffled sound at the door. She started up and saw that Yegor's eyes were open.

"I must have dozed off," she said softly. "Forgive me."

"I'm the one to be forgiven," he said just as softly.

Dusk was staring through the window. The room was chilly and everything had become strangely dim. There was a dark cast to the sick man's face.

The mother heard a rustle of skirts and the voice of Ludmilla.

"Sitting and whispering together here in the dark? Where's the switch?"

Suddenly the room was flooded with glaring light, with Ludmilla's tall straight black figure in the middle of it.

A tremor passed over Yegor's whole body. He raised his hand to his chest.

"What is it?" cried Ludmilla, running over to him.

He looked at the mother with fixed eyes which now seemed large and strangely bright.

Opening his mouth wide, he raised his head and reached out with his hand. The mother took it and looked into his face, not daring to breathe. With a strong convulsive movement he threw back his head and said in a loud voice:

"I can't! It's all over!"

His body gave a slight shudder, his head fell limply on his shoulder, and the cold light of the lamp over the bed was lifelessly reflected in his wide-open eyes.

"Oh, my dear!" whispered the mother.

Ludmilla walked slowly over to the window and stood looking out.

"He's dead!" she cried suddenly in startlingly loud tones. She leaned over and put her elbows on the window sill and then, as though someone had suddenly struck her on the head, she sank moaning to her knees, her hands over her face.

Having crossed Yegor's heavy hands on his chest and straightened his head on the pillow, the mother wiped away her tears and went over to Ludmilla. She bent down and gently stroked her heavy hair. Ludmilla raised her head slowly, and looked at her with dull, dilated eyes, and got up.

"We lived together in exile," she whispered tremulously. "We went out there together and served our sentences. . . . Sometimes it was horrid . . . simply unbearable. Many people lost heart. . . ."

She was seized by a fit of loud, dry sobbing which she suppressed by an effort of will. She drew closer to the mother, her face full of a sad tenderness that made her look younger.

"But his cheerfulness was inexhaustible," she went on in a quick whisper, sobbing without tears. "He would always laugh and joke, hiding his own suffering to encourage the weak ones. He was always good and kind and thoughtful. Out there in Siberia idleness often corrupts people, leading them to give way to their lower instincts. How well he knew how to combat this! You have no idea what a wonderful comrade he was! His personal life was desperately unhappy, but nobody ever heard a word of complaint from his lips! Never! I was a close friend of his. I owe much to his kindness. He gave me all that he could of his rich intellect, yet, tired and lonely as he was, he never asked for the slightest sign of affection or personal attention in exchange. . . ."

She went over to Yegor and bent down to kiss his hand.

"Comrade. My dear, good comrade—thank you—thank you from the bottom of my heart" she said in quiet grief. "Good-bye. I will go on working as you always worked—tirelessly, with unwavering faith, all my life. Good-bye."

Her body was shaken by sobs, and she laid her head on the bed at Yegor's feet. The mother wept silently and profusely. For some reason she tried not to cry; she wanted to comfort Ludmilla with strong comfort, she wanted to speak fine words of love and sorrow. Through her tears she looked at his sunken face, at his eyes, which were half-open, as if he were only dozing, at his blue lips touched by a smile. Everything was hushed and painfully bright. . . .

Ivan Danilovich came in with his short, quick steps. Suddenly he stopped in the middle of the room and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"When did it happen?" he asked in a loud, nervous voice.

Nobody answered. He wiped his brow and walked with a slight stagger over to Yegor, pressed his hand, and stepped aside.

"Nothing unexpected about it. With a heart like his it should have happened six months ago . . . at least."

Suddenly his high, inappropriately loud, artificially calm voice broke. He leaned against the wall, blinking hard and feverishly twisting his beard as he watched the group at the bedside.

"Another one gone," he said quietly.

Ludmilla got up and went to open the window. Presently they were all standing there close together, staring into the dark face of the autumn night. Above the black treetops glittered the stars, deepening the infinite spaces of the sky.

Ludmilla took the mother's arm and silently leaned against her shoulder. The doctor stood, head bowed, polishing his glasses. Through the silence came the weary night sounds of the city. A cold breeze touched their faces and stirred their hair. Ludmilla shuddered as a tear stole down her cheek. Out in the corridor they could hear smothered, frightened sounds—groans, whispers, and a shuffling of feet.

But the three of them stood silent and motionless at the window, staring into the night.

Feeling that she might be in the way here, the mother gently drew her arm away and went to the door, from where she bowed to Yegor.

"Are you going?" asked the doctor quietly without turning round.

"Yes."

Once outside, she thought of Ludmilla, of how she had stifled her sobs.

"She doesn't even know how to cry."

She sighed as she remembered what Yegor had said before he died. As she walked slowly down the street she kept recalling his twinkling eyes, his gaiety, the amusing tales he told.

"It's hard for a good man to live, but easy to die. I wonder how *I* am to die," she thought.

In her mind's eye she saw Ludmilla and the doctor standing at the window of that white and glaring room, with Yegor's dead eyes at their back. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by a great pity for mankind. With a deep sigh she quickened her pace, spurred on by some vague impulse.

"I must hurry!" she thought, succumbing to the sombre but courageous force goading her from within.

XI

The mother spent the entire next day making arrangements for the funeral. In the evening, when she and Sophia and Nikolai were having tea, Sasha appeared, strangely lively and talkative. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were shining merrily, and she seemed to be filled with some joyful hope. Her mood intruded rudely into the quiet sadness with which they had been talking about Yegor. It did not adapt itself, it offended them, it was as dazzling as a fire suddenly flaring up in darkness.

Nikolai thoughtfully tapped the table with his fingers.

"You aren't yourself today, Sasha," he said.

"Aren't I? Perhaps," she said with a happy little laugh.

The mother glanced at her in silent reproof.

"We were just speaking of Yegor Ivanovich," said Sophia as a reminder.

"What a wonderful man he was," exclaimed Sasha. "I never saw him without a smile on his face, and he was always joking. And how he worked! He was an artist of revolution, a master of revolutionary thinking. With what strength and simplicity he always drew his pictures of violence and falsehood and injustice!"

She spoke quietly, smiling contemplatively, but this smile could not quench the fire of exultation which all could see, though none could comprehend.

They did not want Sasha's happy mood to take the place of their melancholy, and they unconsciously defended their right to indulge in grief by trying to make her feel as they did.

"And now he is dead," said Sophia with a studied look at Sasha.

Sasha cast a quick, inquiring glance at all of them and frowned. She lowered her head and fell silent, slowly pinning up her hair. After a strained pause she suddenly looked up.

"He's dead! What does it mean—'dead'? *What* is dead? Is my respect for Yegor dead, or my love for him as a comrade, or my understanding of his ideas? Has the feeling he roused in my heart disappeared, or my knowledge of him as of an honest, courageous man? Is all that dead? For me it can never die. And it seems to me that we are too quick in saying of a person—'he is dead.' 'His lips are dead, but his words shall live on in the hearts of the living!'" In her agitation she sat down at the table again, leaning her elbows on it and saying more quietly and thoughtfully as she smiled at her comrades with misty eyes, "Perhaps what I say sounds foolish, comrades, but I believe in the immortality of honest people, the immortality of those who have given me the happiness of living this wonderful life, a life which thrills me with its amazing intricacy, its wealth of phenomena, and the growth of ideas which are as dear to me as my own heart. Perhaps we are too sparing of emotions. We live too much with our thoughts, and that tends to stunt our personalities. We appraise instead of feeling."

"Has something nice happened to you?" asked Sophia with a smile.

"Yes," said Sasha. "Something very nice, it seems to me. I spent the entire night talking to Vesovshchikov. I never used to like him—I thought he was coarse and ignorant, and he certainly *used* to be. He was filled with a morbid hostility to everyone. He always placed himself in the centre of everything, like a dead weight, and kept saying rudely and viciously: I, I, I! There was something horribly narrow-minded about him." She smiled and looked at them with shining eyes. "But now he says 'Comrades!' And you should hear *how* he says it! With a kind of shy tenderness that can't be expressed in words. Now he's simple and sincere and wants terribly to work. He has found himself—knows his strong points and his shortcomings. But the most important thing is that a genuine feeling of comradeship has been born in him."

As the mother listened to Sasha, she was glad to see that so austere a person could be gentle and joyful. But at the same time, somewhere deep down in her heart she kept thinking jealously, "And what about Pavel?"

"He thinks only of his comrades," Sasha went on, "and do you know what he tried to convince me of? That we must help them escape. He said it could be done very simply and easily."

Sophia raised her head.

"That's an idea, Sasha! What do you think?" she asked eagerly.

The cup of tea trembled in the mother's hands. Sasha drew her brows together and tried to hide her excitement.

"If what he says is true, then we ought to make the attempt. It's our duty to try!" she said after a moment's pause, smiling happily.

Suddenly she blushed and sat down without speaking.

"You darling!" thought the mother with a smile. Sophia also smiled, while Nikolai glanced at Sasha and chuckled. The girl raised her head and gave all of them a stern look. She was pale, her eyes flashed, and her tone was dry and offended.

"I understand why you're laughing," she said. "You think I have some personal reason for wanting to do this."

"Why, Sasha?" asked Sophia archly, getting up and going over to her. The mother saw that Sasha was hurt; Sophia should not have said it. She sighed and looked at her reproachfully.

"Then I refuse to have anything to do with it!" exclaimed Sasha. "I can't be party to it if you're going to look upon it as. . . ."

"Come, come, Sasha," said Nikolai quietly.

The mother went over to her and stroked her hair. The girl grasped her hand and raised her flushed face, and the mother smiled and sighed, at a loss for words. Sophia sat down on the chair next to Sasha and put an arm round her shoulder.

"You're a funny duck," she said, looking into her eyes with a quizzical smile.

"Perhaps it *was* stupid of me. . . ."

"How could you ever have thought such a thing?" said Sophia, but Nikolai interrupted in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Of course we must arrange their escape if such a thing is possible," he said. "But first of all we must find out if our comrades in jail would want us to."

Sasha dropped her head.

Sophia lighted a cigarette, and, with a glance at her brother, threw the match into the corner.

"Surely they couldn't object," sighed the mother. "But I can't believe it's possible."

The mother was anxious to have them assure her it was, but they didn't.

"I must see Vesovshchikov," said Sophia.

"Tomorrow I will tell you when and where you can," said Sasha.

"What are his plans?" asked Sophia as she walked up and down the room.

"He is to be made typesetter in the new print shop. Until then he will live with the forester."

Sasha was frowning and her face had resumed its usual gravity. She spoke curtly.

"You must give Pavel a note when you go to see him the day after tomorrow," said Nikolai, going over to the mother, who was washing the cups. "You see, we have to know—"

"I see, I see," the mother hastened to assure him. "I'll manage to give it to him."

"I'm going now," said Sasha, and after quickly and silently shaking hands with each of them, she went out, stiffly erect, with a particularly resolute step.

When she was gone, Sophia put her hands on the mother's shoulders and rocked her back and forth on the chair.

"Could you love such a daughter, Nilovna?" she asked.

"If only I could see them together for just one day!" exclaimed the mother, ready to cry.

"Yes, a little happiness doesn't harm anyone," said Nikolai softly. "But no one is satisfied with a little. And when there's a lot, it becomes cheap."

Sophia went to the piano and began to play a sad tune.

XII

The next morning some thirty or forty people stood at the gates of the hospital waiting for the coffin of their comrade to be carried out. Among them ranged the spies, listening to their exclamations and taking mental note of faces, manners, and words. A group of policemen with revolvers on their hips were stationed across the street. The crowd was incensed by the boldness of the spies and the sarcastic smiles of the policemen, ready at any moment to demonstrate their force. Some of the people disguised their annoyance by joking, others kept their eyes sullenly fixed on the ground to avoid noticing the insults, while still others, unable to hide their feelings, made biting remarks about authorities who were afraid of people armed with nothing but the spoken word. The pale blue autumn sky shone brightly down on the grey cobblestones strewn with yellow leaves, which the wind blew about the feet of the people.

The mother stood in the middle of the crowd.

"There aren't many of you, not many. And almost no workers," she thought sadly as she looked at the familiar faces.

The gates opened and men bore out the coffin lid, which was covered with wreaths tied with red ribbons. The waiting people instantly took off their hats, giving the impression that a flock of black birds had suddenly taken wing. A tall police officer with a heavy black moustache on a red face strode quickly into the crowd, while behind him came soldiers, unceremoniously pushing the people aside and tramping loudly in their heavy boots.

"Take off the ribbons!" ordered the officer in a hoarse voice.

Men and women pressed about him, talking excitedly, waving their arms and jostling each other. Before the mother's eyes flashed pale, agitated faces with trembling lips; tears rolled down the cheeks of one woman.

"Down with violence!" shouted a young voice, which was immediately drowned in the noise of argument.

The mother's heart was stung, and she turned to a poorly-dressed young man standing next to her.

"They don't even let you hold a funeral the way you'd like," she said indignantly. "It's a disgrace!"

The feeling of hostility grew. Above the heads of the people swayed the coffin lid; the ribbons, blown out by the wind, caught at the heads and faces beneath; there was a dry, nervous rustle of silk.

The mother feared a clash, and she kept muttering hurriedly to right and left, "The devil with them if that's the way they feel about it! Let them have the ribbons. We may as well give in."

Someone's loud, sharp voice rang out above the noise:

"We demand the right to see our comrade off to his final resting place—a comrade whom you tortured to death—"

A high voice began to sing:

You fell, a noble sacrifice....

"Take off the ribbons! Cut them away, Yakovlev!"

A sword swished. The mother shut her eyes in expectation of an outcry. But the people only grumbled and snarled like angry wolves. Silently, with bent heads, they moved forward, filling the air with the sound of their shuffling feet.

The lid of the coffin with its crushed wreaths and clipped ribbons floated in the air above the heads of the people, while beside them swayed mounted police. The mother was walking on the pavement and could not see the coffin itself; the crowd surrounding it had grown imperceptibly, until it filled the street. The grey figures of mounted policemen brought up the rear, while on either side walked policemen with hands on their sword hilts. Everywhere the mother saw the familiar sharp eyes of detectives, carefully scanning the faces of the people.

Farewell, comrade, farewell,

sang two sad voices.

"We can do without that," cried someone. "March in silence, gentlemen."

There was something awe-inspiring in this cry. The melancholy song broke off and conversation was hushed, so that only the dull, even tramp of feet on cobblestones could be heard. This sound rose above the heads of the people and floated up to the transparent sky, shaking the air like the first thunder of a distant storm. A cold wind which kept growing stronger hurled the dust and waste of the city streets at the people; it tore at their hair and clothes, blinded them, struck them in the chest and whirled about their feet.

This silent funeral, without priests and soulful singing, these thoughtful faces and drawn brows, filled the mother with dread. Slow thoughts circled in her mind, and she clothed them in sad words.

"There aren't many of you standing for the truth. . . ."

She walked on with bowed head, and it seemed to her that it was not Yegor they were burying, but something else—something near and dear and essential to her. She felt lonely and uneasy. A murmurous, frightening sense of disagreement with these people who were burying Yegor possessed her heart.

"Yegor didn't believe in God," she thought, "and none of these others do."

She did not wish to pursue the thought, and she sighed, trying to free her soul of a great burden.

"Oh God! Oh dear Jesus! Can it be that I too—like this. . . ."

They reached the cemetery, and for some time twisted along narrow lanes between graves until they came to an open space strewn with low white crosses. Silently they crowded about the open grave. The tense silence of the living among the graves presaged something dreadful which caused the mother's heart to stand still. The wind howled and whistled among the crosses and ruffled the crushed flowers on the lid of the coffin.

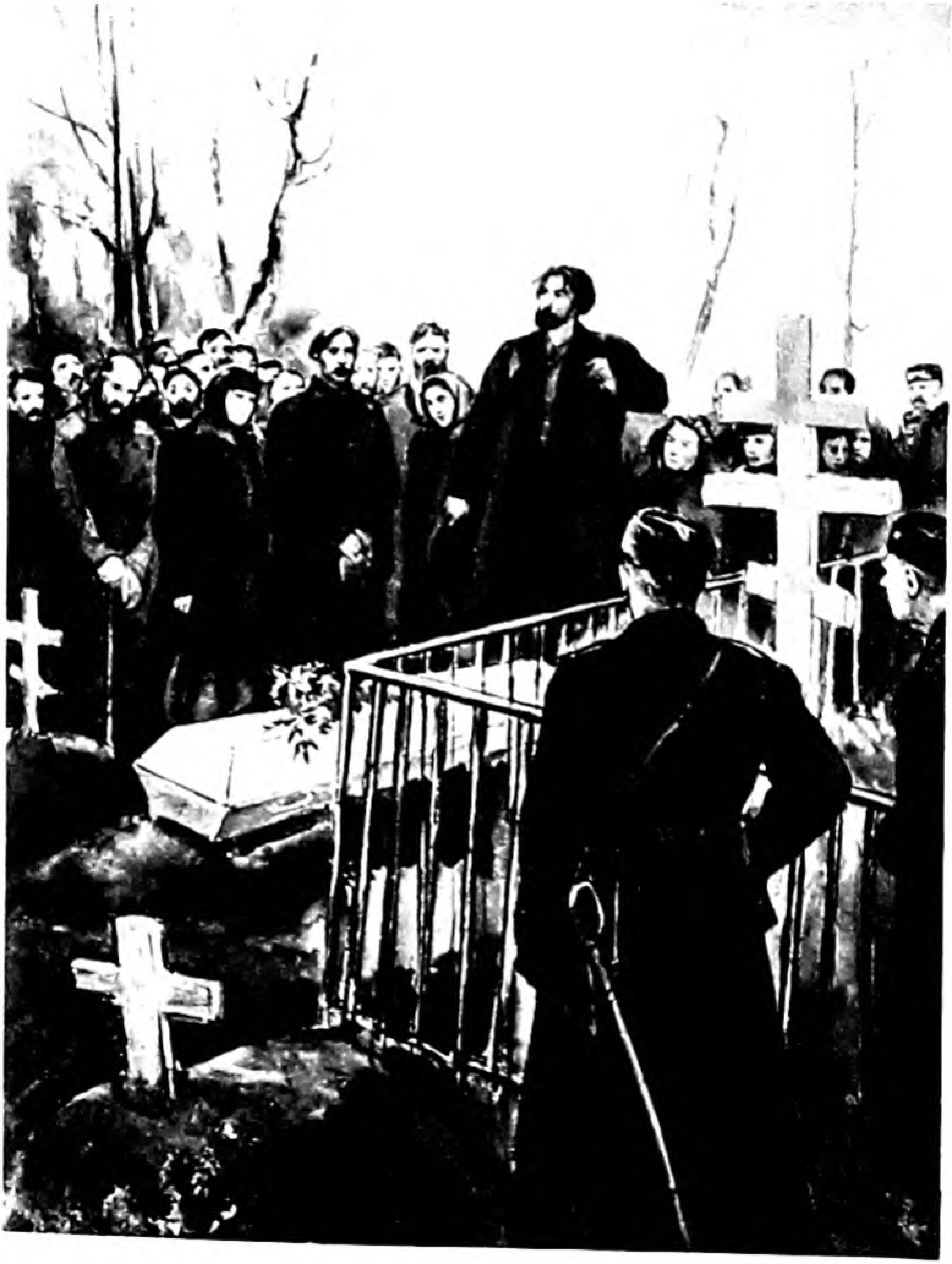
The policemen drew themselves up to attention with their eyes on their chief. A tall young man with a pale face, dark brows and long hair took his place at the head of the grave.

"Gentlemen!" shouted the police-officer hoarsely.

"Comrades!" began the young man in a loud, clear voice.

"Just a minute!" shouted the officer. "I must warn you that I cannot allow any speeches!"

"I will only say a few words," replied the young man calmly. "Comrades! Let us swear at the grave of our friend



and teacher that we shall never forget what he has taught us, and that each of us, all his life, will ceaselessly dig the grave of that power which is the source of all the ills of our native land—that evil, oppressive power, called autocracy!"

"Arrest him!" shrieked the officer, but his voice was drowned in a burst of cries:

"Down with autocracy!"

The policemen pushed their way through the crowd towards the speaker, whose friends had pressed about him protectively.

"Long live freedom!" he cried with a wave of his hand.

The mother was pushed aside. Frightened, she leaned against one of the crosses and shut her eyes, expecting a blow. She was deafened by the confusion of sounds; the earth gave way beneath her feet, and she could hardly catch her breath for the wind and her fear. Police whistles sounded the alarm, rough voices shouted commands, women's voices cried hysterically, fence rails splintered, heavy boots stamped over the dry earth. This lasted for such a long time that she could no longer endure the terror of standing there with closed eyes.

She glanced up and ran forward with a cry, arms outstretched. Not far away, on a narrow path between graves, policemen had surrounded the young man and were beating back the people who rushed to his defence. Bared swords flashed cold and white, now glinting above the heads, now falling in their midst. Canes and broken fence rails were flourished as weapons. The shouting people milled about in a wild dance dominated by the pale face of the young man. Through this storm of passions came his strong voice.

"Comrades! Don't waste your strength!"

His words were heeded. The people threw down their sticks and began to run away, but the mother pressed ahead impelled by some irresistible force. She saw Nikolai with his hat on the back of his head pushing away the infuriated people.

"Are you crazy?" he remonstrated. "Calm yourselves!"

She thought she saw blood on one of his hands.

"Nikolai Ivanovich! Get away from here!" she cried, rushing over to him.

"Where are you going? They'll strike you!"

She felt a hand on her shoulder and saw Sophia standing next to her, hatless, her hair dishevelled, holding a young boy by the hand. The boy, scarcely more than a child, was wiping blood from his face.

"Let me go. . . . It's nothing . . ." he muttered with trembling lips.

"Take care of him—take him to our house. Here's a handkerchief to bind up his face," said Sophia quickly, and when she had put the boy's hand into the mother's she ran away.

"Go quickly or they will arrest you!" she called back.

People were scattering through the cemetery in all directions, with the policemen striding heavily among the graves, catching their feet in the hems of their flowing greatcoats, swearing and brandishing their swords. The boy watched them like a wolf.

"Hurry up!" cried the mother as she wiped his face with the handkerchief.

"Don't bother about me—it doesn't hurt," he said, spitting out the blood. "He hit me with the hilt of his sword. But he got his! I gave him a wallop with a stick that made him howl! Just you wait!" he shouted with a shake of his blood-stained fist. "That's nothing to what's coming! We'll wipe you out without a fight, once we rise up—all us workers!"

"Hurry!" urged the mother as she made her way to the little gate in the cemetery fence. She imagined the police were hiding in wait for them in the open field on the other side of the fence, and that they would rush at them and strike them. But when she reached the gate and glanced out into the field spread with the grey fabric of autumn twilight, she was met by silence and emptiness.

"Here, let me bandage your face," she said.

"Don't bother, I'm not ashamed of it," he said. "It was an honest fight. He gave me mine and I gave him his."

The mother bound up the wound quickly. The sight of the boy's blood filled her with pity for him, and she had a chill of horror when she felt how warm and sticky it was. She hurried him across the field without speaking.

"Where are you taking me, comrade?" he asked superciliously when he had freed his mouth of the bandage. "I can go without your help."

But she felt the trembling of his hand and saw that he swayed on his feet. He kept talking and asking questions without waiting for the answers, and his voice grew weaker and weaker.

"Who are you? I'm a tinsmith and my name's Ivan. There were three of us in Yegor Ivanovich's study circle—three of us tinsmiths, but eleven in all. We were awful fond of him, may his soul rest in peace. Even if I don't believe in God—"

In one of the streets the mother hailed a droshky. When she had seated Ivan she whispered, "Don't say anything," and carefully bound his mouth with the handkerchief.

He raised his hand to his face, but let it drop limply into his lap, too weak to struggle with the bandage. He kept muttering through its folds.

"Don't think I'll ever forget this, you sweet things.

Before he came there was a student named Titovich . . . who used to teach us . . . political economy. . . . They arrested him. . . ."

The mother put her arm round Ivan and drew his head down to her breast. Suddenly the boy slumped over and was silent. Paralyzed with fear, she glanced furtively about. She was afraid the police would come running at her from behind some corner, and on seeing Ivan's bandaged head would seize him and kill him.

"Drunk?" asked the driver, twisting in his seat and smiling good-naturedly.

"Uh-huh. Took more than he could hold," said the mother with a sigh.

"Your son?"

"Yes. A shoemaker. I'm a cook."

"A hard life, yours. Hm-m."

With a flick of his whip, the driver turned round again.

"Hear about the fight just took place in the cemetery?" he asked in lowered tones. "Seems they buried one of these political chaps—one of them that's against the higher-ups—got some kind of a bone to pick with them. Seems the ones that buried him were all of a sort—pals so to speak. And they started yelling, 'Down with the higher-ups! It's them that steal from the people!' Along comes the police and starts beating them. They say some got slashed to death. But the police got theirs too!" He was silent a moment. "Waking up the dead like that!" he added in an awed voice, shaking his head incredulously. "Giving the dead no peace!"

Ivan's head struck softly against the mother's breast as the cab bounced over the cobblestones. The driver sat half-turned on his box, muttering:

"There's unrest got into the people—disorder's spreading. Last night the gendarmes came to one of our neighbours and rummaged round till morning, and then they dragged a blacksmith off with them. People say they'll take him to the river at dead of night and drown him. The blacksmith was a good fellow."

"What was his name?" asked the mother.

"The blacksmith? Savel. Savel Yevchenko. Still young, but he knew a lot. Looks as if it's not allowed to know things. He used to come see us and say: 'What kind of a life are you living, you drivers?' 'Worse'n a dog's life,' we'd say."

"Here we are!" said the mother.

The jerk woke Ivan up, and he gave a low moan.

"He's all in," said the driver. "That's your vodka for you."

With great difficulty Ivan staggered into the yard.

"I'm all right. I can walk alone," he kept protesting.

XIII

Sophia was home already. She was nervous and excited and held a cigarette between her teeth.

When they had put the wounded boy on the couch, she swiftly unbound his head and began giving orders, screwing up her eyes from the smoke of her cigarette.

"They've brought him, Ivan Danilovich! Tired, Nilovna? Had a fright, eh? Well, take a rest now. Give Nilovna a glass of port, Nikolai."

The mother was suffering the shock of what she had just been through; she could hardly breathe and felt a sharp pain in her chest.

"Don't worry about me," she muttered. But her whole being craved attention—kind, comforting attention.

Nikolai came out of the next room and she saw that his hand was bandaged. With him was the doctor, Ivan

Danilovich, dishevelled and bristling like a hedgehog. He went straight to Ivan and bent over him.

"Water," he said. "A lot of water. And some cotton wool and clean linen."

The mother started toward the kitchen, but Nikolai took her by the arm and led her into the dining-room.

"That was said to Sophia, not to you," he said gently. "I'm afraid you're upset, aren't you, my dear?"

When the mother met his searching, sympathetic eyes, she could no longer control herself.

"Oh, what has happened!" she sobbed. "They slashed at people, cut them. . . ."

"I saw it," said Nikolai with a nod as he gave her a glass of wine. "Both sides lost their heads. But don't let it worry you. They struck with the flat of their swords. Only one person was seriously wounded, it seems. I saw it happen, and was able to pull him out of the scuffle."

The mother was soothed by Nikolai's voice, and by the light and warmth of the room. She looked at him gratefully.

"Did they strike you too?" she asked.

"I think I did that myself—carelessly knocked my hand against something or other and took the skin off. Here, have some tea. It's cold out and you aren't dressed very warmly."

She reached for the cup and noticed that her fingers were covered with dry blood. Instantly she dropped her hand into her lap. Her skirt was damp. Her brows shot up and she opened her eyes wide, as she stared at her fingers. Her heart pounded and she felt dizzy.

"Pavel too—they might do the same thing to him!"

Ivan Danilovich entered the room in his vest with his sleeves rolled up. He answered Nikolai's silent query in a high voice.

"The wound on his face is not serious, but his skull is cracked, though not very badly—he's a husky chap. But he's lost a lot of blood. Shall we send him to hospital?"

"Why? Let him stay here," said Nikolai.

"For today, and perhaps tomorrow, but then it will be more convenient for me if he's in the hospital. I have no time to be making calls. Will you write a leaflet about the incident in the cemetery?"

"I will," said Nikolai.

The mother got up quietly and started towards the kitchen.

"Where are you going, Nilovna?" asked Nikolai, stopping her solicitously. "Sophia can do everything without your help."

She glanced at him and gave a little shudder.

"I'm all covered with blood," she said with a queer laugh.

As she was changing her clothes in her own room, she kept wondering at the imperturbability of these people and their ability to take such dreadful things lightly. These thoughts sobered her and drove the fear out of her heart. When she came into the room where the wounded boy was lying, she found Sophia bending over him.

"Nonsense, comrade!" she was saying.

"I'll be in the way," he protested weakly.

"Stop talking—that will do you more good."

The mother stood behind Sophia with her hand on her shoulder and smiled into the boy's white face as she told him how he had frightened her in the droshky by muttering such dangerous things. Ivan's eyes burned feverishly.

"What a fool I am!" he said shamefacedly.

"We're going to leave you now," said Sophia, pulling up his blanket. "Go to sleep."

They went into the dining-room and sat for a long time discussing the events of the day. Accepting them as something already in the past, they looked confidently toward the future, planning the work of the morrow. Their faces were weary, but their thoughts were courageous, and as they spoke of their work, they did not hide their dissatisfaction with themselves. The doctor shifted nervously on his chair.

"Propaganda is not enough these days!" he said, trying to modify his high sharp voice. "The young workers are right—we have to increase the scale of our propaganda. The workers are right, I tell you!"

Nikolai frowned and adopted a doctor's tone.

"On every hand we hear complaints of not enough literature, and still we haven't been able to set up a decent print shop. Ludmilla is wearing herself out. She'll collapse if we don't give her some help."

"What about Vesovshchikov?" asked Sophia.

"He can't live in town. He'll only begin work when we get the new shop going, but we need one more person before we can do that."

"Won't I do?" asked the mother quietly.

All three of them glanced at her for a few seconds without speaking.

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Sophia.

"The work's too hard for you, Nilovna," said Nikolai dryly. "You'd have to live out of town, which would mean you couldn't see Pavel. And in general. . . ."

"That wouldn't mean much to Pavel," she said with a sigh. "And for me, too, to tell the truth, these visits are an ordeal. I'm not allowed to talk to him—just stand there looking at him like a fool while they stare into my mouth to see I don't say anything I shouldn't."

She was worn out by the events of the last few days; and now when there seemed to be a chance to live far away from the drama of the city, she eagerly seized it.

But Nikolai changed the subject.

"What's on your mind, Ivan?" he said, turning to the doctor.

The doctor raised his drooping head.

"I'm thinking how few of us there are!" he replied gloomily. "We have to work more energetically. And we have to convince Pavel and Andrei that they must escape. They're too valuable to be sitting there doing nothing."

Nikolai frowned, shook his head, and glanced at the mother. Realizing that they hesitated to talk about her son in her presence, she got up and went out, hurt that they should have disregarded her wish. As she lay in bed with her eyes open, listening to the soft murmur of voices, she was filled with alarm.

The day had been darkly incomprehensible and full of evil portent. But she did not want to think of this. She put aside all disturbing impressions and centred her attention on Pavel. She wanted him to be free, but at the same time she was afraid. She felt that events about her were leading to a climax, to some severe clash. People's silent endurance was giving way to tense anticipation. Their irritation had noticeably increased. On every hand she heard sharp words and everything breathed of unrest. Every proclamation called forth animated discussions at the market, in the shops, among servants and craftsmen. Every arrest in town was followed by frightened and perplexed comments, sometimes unwittingly sympathetic, as to its cause. More and more often she heard simple people using the words that had once frightened her: uprising, Socialists, politics. If they were spoken sarcastically, there was curiosity behind the sarcasm; if they were spoken maliciously, there was fear behind the malice; if they were spoken thoughtfully, the thought contained hope, and a threat. Slowly the circles of unrest expanded upon the dark waters of this stagnant life. Ideas which had lain dormant began to awake, and the usual calm acceptance of the day's events was shaken. She could see this more clearly than other people, for she had a better knowledge of life's stern physiognomy, and now as she saw it lined by thought and discontent, she was both glad and afraid: glad because she saw in this the work of her son; afraid because she knew that if he escaped from prison he would take his place in the vanguard, where the danger was greatest. And he would perish.

Sometimes the image of her son assumed the proportions of a storied hero, embodying all the fine and stirring words she had ever heard, all the people she had ever admired, everything bright and heroic she had ever known. At such times she would be filled with pride and tenderness and would contemplate him with quiet ecstasy.

"Everything will be all right," she would think.

But then the mother in her would crowd out the greater humanity, consume it as fire consumes, leaving one anguishing thought throbbing in the ashes of her exaltation:

"They'll kill him . . . they'll kill him."

XIV

One noon she sat opposite Pavel in the prison office, gazing at his unshaven face with misty eyes and seeking an opportunity to hand him the note crushed between her fingers.

"I'm well and so is everyone else," he said quietly. "How are you?"

"All right. Yegor Ivanovich died," she replied mechanically.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pavel. Slowly he bowed his head.

"The police started a fight at the funeral and arrested one fellow," went on the mother innocently. The assistant to the head of the prison clicked his tongue and jumped up.

"Don't you know it's forbidden to say such things?" he muttered. "It's not allowed to talk about politics."

The mother got up too.

"I wasn't talking about politics, but about a fight," she said apologetically. "They really did fight. They even smashed the head of one chap. . . ."

"It's all the same. I must ask you not to mention it. That is, not to mention anything that doesn't concern you personally—that is, your family and your home and such things—"

Feeling that he was getting entangled, he sat down at the desk again and began leafing through some papers.

"I'm the one who has to answer for such things," he added wearily.

Without taking her eyes off him, the mother quickly thrust the note into Pavel's hands and gave a sigh of relief.

"You don't understand what you're allowed to talk about," said the assistant.

"Neither do I," laughed Pavel.

"Then there's no sense in coming here," he remarked irritably. "Don't know what to talk about but keep coming here—bothering people. . . ."

"Is the trial to be held soon?" asked the mother.

"The prosecutor was here a few days ago and said it would be soon. . . ."

They exchanged a few more trifling remarks, and the mother noticed that Pavel was gazing at her lovingly. He was as calm and even-tempered as ever. He had not changed, except for the whiteness of his hands and the beard on his face, that made him look much older. She wanted to tell him something pleasant—to let him know about Nikolai—and so in the same tone in which she had been passing innocent remarks, she said:

"I saw your godson the other day. . . ."

Pavel searched her eyes in silent inquiry. She began to tap her cheek with her fingers to remind him of the pockmarks on Vesovshchikov's face.

"The boy's getting along—going to be given a job soon."

Her son understood and nodded, his eyes laughing merrily.

"That's fine," he said.

"Well, I guess that's about all," she concluded, pleased with herself and touched by his happiness.

He squeezed her hand tightly in parting.

"Thanks, mother."

The joyous knowledge of their closeness went to her head like strong wine. Unable to find words to answer him, she gripped his hand in silence.

She found Sasha waiting for her when she got home. The girl usually came to see her on the days when she went to the jail. She never asked about Pavel, and if the mother herself did not mention him, she satisfied her curiosity by looking long into the mother's eyes. But this time she met her with an anxious inquiry.

"How is he?"

"All right."

"Did you give him the note?"

"Yes. You should have seen how I slipped it to him!"

"Did he read it?"

"There? How could he?"

"Oh yes, I forgot," said the girl slowly. "We'll have to wait another week—a whole week! Do you think he'll consent?"

Sasha frowned and looked intently at the mother.

"I can't tell," mused the mother. "Why shouldn't he, if it's not dangerous."

Sasha tossed her head.

"Do you know what the patient is allowed to eat?" she asked. "He's hungry."

"He can eat anything. Just a second and I'll. . . ."

She went into the kitchen and Sasha followed her.

"May I help you?"

"Goodness, no!"

The mother bent down and took out a bowl out of the oven.

"Wait . . ." said the girl quietly.

Her face paled and her eyes dilated painfully as she whispered with trembling lips:

"I wanted to ask you—I'm sure he won't consent—I beg you to talk him into it! We need him so badly! Tell him it's for the sake of the cause. Tell him I'm afraid for his health. You can see for yourself—the date of the trial hasn't even been set. . . ."

Evidently it cost her an effort to say this. Her voice faltered, she stood rigidly erect and averted her eyes, then closed them wearily and bit her lip. The mother could hear the cracking of her clenched fingers.

Pelagea was upset by this outburst, but she understood Sasha and put her arms round her.

"My dear girl," she said sadly, "he won't listen to anybody but himself—nobody at all."

They stood there in silence, pressed close to each other.

Then Sasha gently disengaged herself from the mother's arms.

"You're right," she said with a shudder. "This is foolish. Nerves." Then with calm matter-of-factness, "Very well, let's feed our patient."

She sat down beside Ivan and asked him if his head ached.

"Not much, but everything's still sort of hazy. And I feel weak," he answered, pulling the blanket up under his chin in his embarrassment and screwing up his eyes as though the light were too bright. Sasha saw that he was too shy to eat in her presence, so she got up and went out. Ivan sat up and followed her with his eyes.

"What a beauty!" he murmured.

He had merry blue eyes, close-set little teeth, and a voice that was still changing.

"How old are you?" asked the mother.

"Seventeen."

"And where are your parents?"

"In the village. I've been here since I was ten years old. Came as soon as I finished school. What's your name, comrade?"

The mother was always amused and touched when people called her "Comrade."

"Why do you want to know?" she asked with a smile.

"You see," he explained after an embarrassed pause, "one of the students from our study circle—that is, one of those who teach us, told us about the mother of Pavel Vlassov, the worker. Remember the First of May demonstration?"

The mother nodded, instantly alert.

"He was the first to carry our banner through the streets," announced the boy proudly, and his pride was echoed in the heart of the mother.

"I wasn't there then. We wanted to hold our own demonstration, but it fell through. Too few of us. But we'll do it next year, you'll see!"

He could hardly breathe with anticipation.

"It's that Vlassov's mother I was talking about," he concluded, waving his spoon. "She joined the party after that too. They say she's simply a marvel!"

The mother gave a broad smile. It was pleasant to hear the boy's praise. Pleasant and disconcerting. She wanted to say to him: "I'm that Vlassov's mother," but instead she said to herself, with gentle sarcasm, "You're an old fool, that's what you are."

"Come, eat some more. You must hurry and get well for the sake of the cause," she suddenly said in agitation, bending over the boy.

The street door opened, letting in the damp, cold breath of autumn, and the mother looked up to see Sophia standing there, all smiling and rosy.

"Goodness gracious, you'd think I was an eligible heiress, the way the spies are courting me! Time for me to be moving on. . . . Well, how are you, Ivan? Feeling better? What news from Pavel, Nilovna? Is Sasha here?"

She looked fondly at the mother and the boy with her grey eyes as she lighted a cigarette and asked questions to which she expected no answers. The mother smiled as she watched her.

"I'm getting to be considered one of these good people myself!" she thought.

Once more she bent over Ivan.

"Hurry and get well, son!" she said.

Then she went into the dining-room, where she found Sophia talking to Sasha.

"She has already prepared three hundred copies. She'll kill herself at the rate she's going. It's simply heroic, What a privilege to live among such people, Sasha, to be their comrade and work with them."

"Indeed it is," answered the girl softly.

While they were having tea that evening, Sophia turned to the mother and said, "You'll be having to pay another visit to the country, Nilovna."

"Very well. When?"

"Do you think you could manage it in about three days?"

"I could."

"This time you must hire post horses and take another route—through the Nikolskoye volost," said Nikolai. He was frowning and sullen, an expression which did not become him; it spoiled his usual benign equanimity.

"That's a long way—through Nikolskoye," observed the mother. "And to hire horses. . . ."

"To tell you the truth," said Nikolai, "I'm against this trip. Things are not quiet there—arrests have been made—took some teacher it seems. We must be more careful. Wouldn't it be better to bide our time?"

"We have to keep them supplied with literature all the time," observed Sophia, tapping on the table with her fingers. "Are you afraid to go, Nilovna?" she asked suddenly.

The mother was hurt.

"Have I ever been afraid? I wasn't afraid the first time I went, and now—why should you—" she dropped her head without finishing the sentence. Whenever they asked her if she was afraid, or if she didn't mind, or if she thought she could do such-and-such a thing, she felt that they were asking a favour of her, and that she was being set apart and not treated as they treated one another.

"Why should you ask me if I'm afraid?" she said in a choked voice. "You don't ask each other such things."

Nikolai took off his glasses and put them on again, looking intently at his sister. Unable to stand the strained silence, the mother got up guiltily and wanted to say something, but Sophia stopped her by taking her hand.

"Forgive me. I'll never do it again," she said softly.

This brought a smile to the mother's face, and in a few minutes all three of them were busily discussing the proposed trip.

XV

At dawn the mother was jogging along in a post chaise over a road washed by autumn rains. A raw wind was blowing and mud was splashing on every hand. The coachman twisted about on his seat to complain to her in a nasal voice, "So I says to him—to my brother, that is—let's share I says. So we begin to share. . . ." Suddenly he struck out with his whip at the left-hand horse and shouted angrily, "Get along, there, you witch's spawn!"

The fat crows of autumn stepped anxiously over the bare furrows while a cold wind whistled all around. The crows braced themselves to meet the attacks of the wind, which ruffled their feathers and blew them off their feet, forcing them to flap their way lazily to another spot.

"So he goes and skins me out of my share. I see there's nothing I can put my hands on . . ." went on the coachman.

The mother listened to him as in a dream. Through her memory streamed the events of the last few years and she saw herself actively participating in all of them. Formerly the conditions of life had been laid down somewhere far away, nobody knew by whom or for what purpose; but now many of these conditions were being changed before her very eyes and with her own participation. This made her feel pleased with herself, yet distrustful of her powers; she was perplexed and filled with sadness.

Everything about her was moving slowly: leaden clouds pursued one another ponderously across the sky; the wet trees on either side of the road waved their bare branches in passing; the fields gave place to low hills, which disappeared in their turn.

The nasal voice of the coachman, the jingle of the harness bells, the rustle of the damp wind, all merged to form a vibrant stream flowing steadily over the fields.

"Paradise itself's too little for a rich man," went on the coachman, swaying on his seat. "So he begins squeezing me out—the authorities was all friends of his. . . ."

When they reached the station he unharnessed the horses.

"You might give me five kopeks for a drink," he said to the mother plaintively.

She gave him the coin and he tossed it in his palm.

"Three of them goes for vodka, the other two for bread," he said.

In the afternoon the mother arrived, cold and weary, at the little town of Nikolskoye. She went to the station for a glass of tea and took a seat by the window, placing her heavy suitcase under a bench. From the window she could see a small square covered with trampled yellow grass, and a dark grey building with a sagging roof—the local administration building. A bald and bearded muzhik with no coat over his shirt was sitting smoking a pipe on the veranda. A pig was browsing on the grass of the square. It flipped its ears irritably, shook its head and buried its snout in the earth.

The clouds drifted in great dark masses. Everything was quiet and dark and dreary, as though life were lying in wait.

Suddenly a police sergeant came galloping on to the square and drew up his horse in front of the volost building.

He flourished his whip in the air and shouted at the muzhik. His cries vibrated against the window, but the words were lost. The muzhik got up and pointed into the distance. The sergeant rolled off his horse, tossed the reins to the muzhik, staggered to the steps, seized the railing, pulled himself up to the veranda, and disappeared through the door.

Everything was silent again. Twice the horse dug a hoof into the soft earth. Into the room came a girl in her early teens, with yellow hair worn in a short braid, and soft eyes in a round face. She kept biting her lip and nodding her head as she carried in a battered tray loaded with dishes.

"Good afternoon, my dear," said the mother.

"Good afternoon."

When she had placed the tea things on the table, the girl suddenly announced excitedly, "They just caught a robber—they're—bringing him here!"

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"Who did he rob?"

"I don't know," repeated the girl. "I only heard they caught him. The guard's gone to call the chief of police."

The mother glanced through the window and saw that peasants were gathering on the square. Some of them came slowly and sedately, others rushed to the scene, buttoning up their sheepskins as they came. They gathered in front of the building and stood looking off to the left.

The girl, too, glanced through the window and ran out of the room, banging the door behind her. The mother started at the sound, pushed her suitcase further under the bench, threw a shawl over her head, and hurried to the door, suppressing an unaccountable urge to run.

When she reached the veranda, an icy blast seemed to strike her in eyes and chest; she gasped for breath and her legs gave way beneath her: across the square came Rybin, his hands tied behind him, a policeman on either side, striking the ground with their sticks as they walked. The crowd stood silently waiting in front of the veranda.

Stunned, the mother could not tear her eyes away. Rybin was saying something; she could hear his voice, but his words raised no echo in the dark emptiness of her heart.

She took a deep breath and pulled herself together. Near the veranda stood a muzhik with blue eyes and a wide, fair beard, gazing intently at her. She coughed and rubbed her throat with hands weak with fear.

"What has happened?" she forced herself to ask him.

"See for yourself," he answered, and turned away. Another muzhik came over and stood by her.

The policemen leading Rybin stopped in front of the crowd, which kept growing, though the people remained silent. Suddenly the voice of Rybin rose above their heads.

"True believers! Have you heard about the leaflets telling the truth about the lives of us peasants? Well, it's for those leaflets I'm paying now. I'm the one that spread them among the people!"

The crowd drew closer about Rybin. His voice was calm and steady, and that brought the mother to her senses.

"Hear that?" said the second muzhik quietly, nudging the blue-eyed one. The latter raised his head and glanced at the mother again without answering. The other one looked at her too. He was younger than the first, and had a stringy dark beard and a thin face spotted with freckles. Then both of them moved away.

"They're afraid," thought the mother.

She became more attentive. From the veranda where she was standing she could plainly see the dark, bruised face of Mikhailo Ivanovich and the impassioned shine of his eyes.

She wanted him to see her too, so she stood on her toes and craned her neck.

The people looked at him with sullen distrust and said nothing. Only at the back of the crowd could be heard hushed conversation.

"Peasants!" said Rybin in a strained, loud voice. "Believe what's written in those papers. Maybe I'll have to pay for them with my life—they beat me and tortured me trying to find out where I got them, and they'll beat me again. But I'm ready to stand anything, because it's the truth that's told in those papers and the truth ought to be dearer to us than our daily bread—that's what!"

"Why should he say that?" exclaimed one of the muzhiks standing near the veranda.

"It's all the same now," answered the blue-eyed one. "A fellow can only die once."

The people still stood there without a word, gazing sullenly at Rybin, and it seemed as if some invisible weight was pressing down on them.

The police sergeant came staggering out on the veranda.

"Who's talking here?" he yelled drunkenly.

Suddenly he slid down the steps, grabbed Rybin by the hair and shook him.

"Was it you, you son of a bitch?" he shouted.

The crowd stirred and began to mutter. The mother dropped her head in helpless suffering. Once more the voice of Rybin rang out:

"Look, good people! . . ."

"Shut up!" The sergeant struck him over the ear. Rybin swayed and hunched his shoulders.

"They tie a fellow's hands and do whatever they like with him. . . ."

"Take him away, policemen! And all you people go home!" The sergeant kept leaping in front of Rybin like a dog with a bone, striking him in the face and chest and stomach with his fist.

"Stop hitting him!" cried someone in the crowd.

"Why should you hit him?" came a supporting voice.

"Let's go," said the blue-eyed muzhik with a nod to his companion. They both sauntered away, and the mother followed them with a kindly glance. She gave a sigh of relief as she saw the police sergeant run clumsily up the steps of the veranda.

"Bring him here! I'll show him!" he screamed, shaking his fist.

"Don't do it!" came a strong voice from the crowd. The mother saw that it was the muzhik with the blue eyes who was speaking. "Don't let them, fellows! If they take him there they'll beat him to death. Then they'll say we did it. Don't let them!"

"Peasants!" boomed Mikhailo. "Can't you see what your lives are like? Can't you see how they rob you and cheat you and suck your blood? Everything comes from you—you're the greatest force on this earth—and what rights have you? Only the right to die of starvation!"

Suddenly the peasants started shouting, interrupting each other:

"He's telling the truth!"

"Call the chief of police! Where's the chief of police?"

"The police sergeant's gone for him."

"Who, that drunk?"

"It's not our business to call the authorities."

The noise increased.

"Speak up! We won't let them touch you!"

"Untie his hands!"

"See you don't get caught!"

"The ropes are hurting my hands," said Rybin, drowning out all other voices with his deep, sonorous tones. "I won't run away, muzhiks! I can't hide from the truth—it lives inside me!"

A few of the men separated from the crowd and stood off to one side, passing remarks and shaking their heads. But more and more ragged people came running up in a state of great excitement. They seethed about Rybin, who rose from their midst like a forest shrine, waving his hands above his head and shouting:

"Thank you, good people, thank you! If we don't untie each other's hands, who'll do it for us?"

He wiped his beard and raised a blood-stained hand.

"Here's my blood—shed for the sake of Truth!"

The mother went down the steps of the veranda, but since she could not see Mikhailo for the crowd, she climbed up again. Some vague happiness fluttered in her heart.

"Peasants! Watch for these leaflets and read them! Don't believe the priests and the authorities when they tell you the preachers of truth are heathens and rebels. Truth is wandering in secret over the earth, seeking a nest for herself among the people. She's like fire and sword for the authorities. They can't accept her—she'll slay them and burn them! For you Truth is a good friend; for them she's a bitter enemy. That's why she wanders in secret over the earth!"

Once more exclamations broke out among the crowd:

"Listen, true believers!"

"You'll come to a bad end, brother!"

"Who handed you over to the police?"

"The priest!" answered one of the policemen.

Two of the peasants gave a mighty oath.

"Watch out, fellows!" came somebody's warning voice.

XVI

The chief of police was coming towards the crowd. He was a tall, heavy-set man with a round face. He wore his cap cocked over one ear, one side of his moustache was twisted upwards and the other downwards, so that his face seemed to be permanently twisted in a mirthless smile. He held a sword in his left hand and gestured vigorously with his right. Everyone heard his firm, heavy steps approaching. The crowd parted to let him through, its clamour subsiding like water sinking into the ground. All the faces grew sullen. The mother felt her eyes burning and the muscles of her forehead quivering. Again she wanted to join the crowd. She leaned forward and stood tense and motionless.

"What's this?" asked the chief of police, halting in front of Rybin and eyeing him superciliously. "Why aren't his hands tied? Tie them, men!"

His voice was high and ringing, but it was a colourless voice.

"They were tied. The people untied them," answered one of the policemen.

"What's that? The people? What people?"

The chief of police glanced at the crowd standing in a semicircle in front of him.

"Who are they, the people?" he asked without the slightest inflexion of his colourless voice. He touched the blue-eyed muzhik with the flat of his sword hilt.

"I suppose you're the people, Chumakov? Well, and who else? You, Mishin?" He grabbed one of them by the beard with his right hand. "You better be clearing out of here, you bastards, or I'll give it to you—I'll show you!"

His expression was not angry or threatening. He spoke calmly and struck the people with a customary swing of his long arms. They retreated before him with lowered heads and averted faces.

"Well, what are you here for?" he said to the policemen. "Tie his hands, I tell you!"

He let out a string of oaths and looked at Rybin again.

"Hands behind your back, you!" he bawled.

"I don't want them to tie my hands," said Rybin. "I won't run away and I won't fight, so why tie my hands?"

"What's that?" asked the chief of police, stepping towards him.

"High time you stopped torturing the people, you brutes!" said Rybin, raising his voice. "But you'll get yours soon now!"

The chief of police stood looking into his face with trembling moustaches.

"You son of a bitch! So that's how you talk!" he hissed in amazement, taking one step back.

Suddenly he gave Rybin a stunning blow in the face.

"You can't kill the truth with your fists!" shouted Rybin, advancing towards him. "And you have no right to hit me, you filthy dog!"

"*I* have no right? *I*?" howled the chief of police.

He swung his fist again, aiming at Rybin's head. Rybin ducked and the blow missed him, nearly upsetting the chief of police. Someone in the crowd snorted, and once more Rybin's wrathful voice could be heard:

"Don't dare touch me I tell you, you devil!"

The police officer glanced about and saw that the people had drawn together to form a dark and lowering ring.

"Nikita!" shouted the chief. "Eh, Nikita!"

A short, thick-set muzhik in a sheepskin jacket stepped out of the crowd. His large, tousled head was bent.

"Nikita!" said the chief of police as he calmly twirled his whiskers. "Give him a box on the ear—a good one!"

The muzhik stepped forward, halted in front of Rybin, and raised his head. Rybin struck him in the face with sure, heavy words:

"Just look, people, how the brutes choke you with your own hands! Take a good look, and think it over!"

Slowly the muzhik raised his arm and delivered Rybin a mild blow on the head.

"Is that the way to do it, you bastard?" shrieked the chief.

"Hey, Nikita!" came a voice from the crowd. "Don't forget there's a God!"

"Strike him, I tell you!" shouted the chief, taking the muzhik by the nape of the neck. But Nikita lowered his head and moved away.

"I've done enough," he muttered.

"What?"

A spasm passed over the face of the chief of police; he stamped his foot and rushed at Rybin with an oath. Then came the thud of a blow that sent Rybin reeling. He raised his arm, but a second blow knocked him down, and the chief of police began kicking him in the chest and sides and head.

An angry murmur rose from the crowd. The people began to move against the chief, but he noticed this and jumped back, whipping his sword out of its hilt.

"What's this? An uprising? Aha! So that's it!"

His voice quavered and broke, and he gave futile little squeaks. And as his voice failed him, so did his strength. His head drooped, his shoulders sagged, and he glanced about vapidly as he backed away, carefully feeling the ground with his feet.

"Very well," he shouted hoarsely. "Take him away—

I'm going. Come now, don't you know he's a political criminal, you bastards? Don't you know he's stirring up the people against the tsar? And you defend him! So you're rebels too, eh?"

The mother stood without moving, without so much as blinking, all her strength gone, her mind a blank, like one in a nightmare, overcome by fear and pity. The sullen, hurt, angry cries of the people buzzed like hornets inside her head. She heard the quavering voice of the chief of police and somebody whispering.

"If he's guilty, take him to court. . . ."

"Take pity on him, Your Honour. . . ."

"It's the truth, there's no law allows such treatment."

"Indeed there isn't. If such a thing is possible, then anyone can give a fellow a beating. A fine thing that! . . ."

The people broke up into two groups: one crowded round the chief of police, shouting at and pleading with him; the other one, which was smaller, stood about the prostrate man and muttered menacingly. Several people from the smaller group helped Rybin get up, and when the policemen tried to tie his hands again, they cried:

"Don't be in such a hurry, you devils!"

Mikhailo wiped the dirt and blood from his face and beard and looked about him silently. His glance fell on the mother. She gave a start and leaned towards him, involuntarily waving her hand. But he turned away. A few minutes later his eyes sought out her face. It seemed to her that he straightened up and raised his head, and his blood-stained cheeks trembled.

"He recognized me—can it really be that he recognized me?"

She nodded to him, all aquiver with an awful yearning. The next moment she noticed that the blue-eyed muzhik was standing beside him, looking at her too. For a second his glance filled her with fear.

"What am I doing? They'll take me too!"

The muzhik said something to Rybin, who replied with a shake of his head.

"It's all right," he said in a voice that was clear and courageous, in spite of its trembling. "I'm not alone on the earth! They'll never round up all of the truth. The memory of me will remain wherever I've been. Even if they have torn out the nest . . . taken all the comrades. . . ."

"He's saying that to me," guessed the mother.

"But the day will come when the eagles will fly free—the people will break their fetters!"

A woman brought a pail of water and began to wash Rybin's face, crying as she did so. Her high, plaintive wail mingled with the words Mikhailo was saying, so that the mother could not distinguish them. A group of peasants came over with the chief of police at their head.

"Bring a cart to take the prisoner away! Whose turn is it this time?" somebody shouted.

Then came the voice of the chief of police, speaking in a new tone—one that was almost offended.

"I can strike you," he said, "but you can't strike me. You don't dare, you fathead!"

"Is that so? Who do you think you are—God?" shouted Rybin.

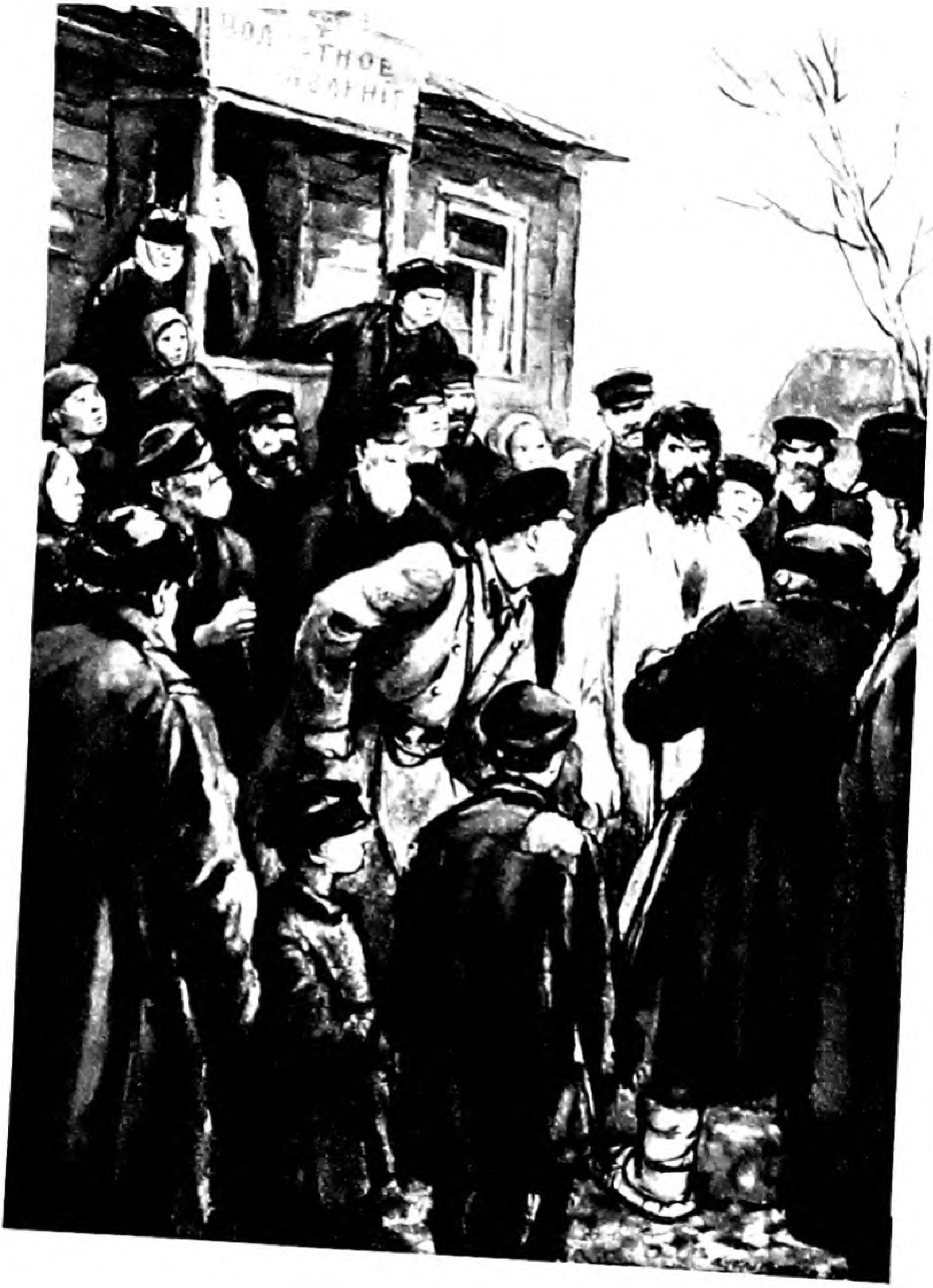
A burst of hushed exclamations drowned his voice.

"Don't argue with him, brother! He's one of the authorities!"

"You mustn't be angry with him, Excellency. He's not himself!"

"Keep quiet, simpleton!"

"They're going to take you to town now."



"There's more law in the town!"

The cries of the people were suppliant and conciliatory. They merged in a vague hum which expressed little hope. The policemen took Rybin by the arms and led him up the steps of the volost building and through the door. The muzhiks gradually dispersed, but the mother saw the blue-eyed muzhik coming toward her, looking up at her from under lowered brows. Her knees gave way and despair sucked at her heart, engulfing her in a wave of nausea.

"I mustn't go away," she thought. "I mustn't."

She clutched the railing and waited.

The chief of police was standing on the veranda waving his arms and speaking reproachfully, his voice once more dull and spiritless.

"It's fools you are, you sons of bitches. Sticking your noses into things you don't know anything about. This is a state affair, you swine! You've got me to thank. You ought to get down on your knees to me for being so good to you. If I wanted to, I could ship the whole lot of you off to hard labour."

A couple of dozen peasants stood with bared heads listening to him. It grew darker as the clouds lowered. The blue-eyed muzhik came over to the veranda where the mother was standing.

"See what's going on?"

"Yes," answered the mother softly.

"What's your business here?" he asked, looking her straight in the eye.

"I buy laces from the peasant women—linen too."

The muzhik slowly stroked his beard.

"Our women don't make those things," he said dully, with a glance towards the door of the building.

The mother shot him a quick glance and waited for a convenient moment to go inside. The muzhik's face was handsome and thoughtful and he had mournful eyes. He was tall and broad-shouldered, dressed in a patched kaftan, a clean cotton shirt and brown home-spun trousers, with worn boots on his bare feet.

For some reason the mother gave a sigh of relief.

"Could you take me in for the night?" she said suddenly, in response to an instinct swifter than her groping thoughts.

The minute she had said it, everything in her grew taut—her bones, her muscles. She drew herself erect and looked at the man unwaveringly. But barbed thoughts kept pricking at her mind: "I'll be the ruin of Nikolai Ivanovich. And I won't see Pavel again for a long, long time. They'll beat me."

The muzhik answered unhurriedly, keeping his eyes on the ground as he pulled his kaftan over his chest.

"Take you in for the night? Why not? Only mine's a poor sort of hut."

"I'm not used to better," said the mother.

"All right," agreed the muzhik, raising his head and measuring her with his eyes. It was quite late now, and his face and eyes shone coldly in the dusk.

"Then I'll come quickly. Maybe you'll carry my suitcase for me?" she said softly, with a feeling that she was slipping downhill.

"All right."

He lifted his shoulders and pulled his kaftan together again.

"Here comes the cart," he said.

Rybin appeared on the veranda. His head and face were wrapped in something grey and his hands were tied.

"Good-bye, good people!" came his voice through the cold twilight. "Seek the truth, and treasure it! Trust a man who brings you the honest word, and don't spare yourselves in defence of the truth."

"Shut your mouth!" shouted the chief of police. "Lash those horses, you fool of a policeman!"

"What have you to lose? Look how you live!" The cart set off. "Why should you go on starving to death?" called Rybin, who was sitting between two policemen. "If you get your freedom, you'll have bread and justice! Good-bye, good people!"

His voice was swallowed up by the rattle of the wheels, the clatter of hoofs, and the shouts of the chief of police.

"All over," said the muzhik with a shake of his head; then, turning to the mother, "Wait for me here at the station. I'll be back in a minute."

The mother went into the room and sat down at the table in front of the samovar. She picked up a piece of bread, looked at it, and put it back on the plate. She had no desire for food—that nausea was coming back again. She felt uncomfortably warm. The sickness weakened her, drained the blood from her heart, and made her dizzy. She kept seeing the face of that blue-eyed muzhik—a strange face, somehow incomplete and inspiring distrust. She did not want to think he would betray her, but this idea had entered her mind and lay heavily on her heart.

"He noticed me," she thought weakly. "He noticed me and—guessed."

The thought went no further, caught, as it were, in the slough of sickness and despair.

The breathless silence that had followed the recent commotion in the square, showed that the villagers were cowed, and it heightened the mother's sense of loneliness, filling her soul with gloom as soft and grey as ashes.

The girl appeared in the doorway again.

"Shall I bring you some fried eggs?" she asked.

"Don't bother. I don't feel like eating. They frightened me with their shouts and cries."

The girl came up to the table. "You should have seen how the chief of police beat him!" she said in an excited whisper. "I was standing close by. He knocked out his teeth and I saw the man spit—the blood was thick and dark red—his eyes swelled up that tight! He's a tarman. The police sergeant's lying upstairs dead drunk and still asking for drink. He says there was a whole band of them, and him with the beard was their head—the *ataman*, so to say. They caught three of them, but one got away. They caught a schoolteacher too who belonged to their band. They don't believe in God and talk other people out of believing in Him so that they can rob the churches—that's the kind they are! Some of our muzhiks felt sorry for him, but others say he ought to be hanged. We've got lots of muzhiks as nasty as that!"

The mother listened attentively to the girl's quick disconnected speech, trying to overcome her fear and dismal expectations. The girl seemed glad to have someone listen to her, and rattled on with growing fervour.

"My pa says it all comes from a bad harvest. For two years the land has given us nothing, and it's been hard on the muzhiks. That's why they're so nasty. They shout and scrap at the village meetings. One day when they were selling out Vasukov to pay his debts, he gave the village elder such a smack in the face! 'There's my debts for you,' he says."

Heavy steps were heard outside the door. The mother grasped the table and pulled herself to her feet.

The blue-eyed muzhik came in without taking off his cap.

"Where's your suitcase?" he said.

He lifted it easily and shook it.

"Empty. Marka, take this woman to my hut."

He went out without looking back.

"Are you spending the night here?" asked the girl.

"Yes. I came for laces—I buy laces. . . ."

"They don't make laces here. They make them in Tinkovo and Daryina, but not here," explained the girl.

"Then I'll go there tomorrow."

When the mother had paid for the tea, she delighted the girl by giving her a three-kopek tip. They went outside and the girl stepped lightly over the damp earth in her bare feet.

"I'll go over to Daryina if you want me to and tell the women to bring their laces here," she said. "That will save you a ride. After all, it's twelve versts."

"Don't bother, dear," said the mother, hurrying to keep up. The cold air refreshed her, and a vague resolution was taking form within her. It grew slowly and uncertainly, but there was promise in it, and in her desire to spur it on she kept asking herself, "What shall I do? If I make a clean breast of everything. . . ."

The night was cold and damp. Unwinking reddish lights glowed in the windows of the huts. The silence was broken by the shouts of the shepherds and the drowsy lowing of cattle. The village was wrapped in dark and brooding meditation.

"Here we are," said the girl. "It's a miserable place you've picked for a night's lodging—he's such a poor muzhik."

She felt for the door and opened it.

"Aunt Tatyana!" she called boldly.

Then she ran away.

"Good-bye!" came her voice through the darkness.

XVII

The mother went in and raised her hand to her eyes to get a better glimpse of the hut. It was small, but she was immediately struck by its cleanliness. A young woman glanced out from behind the stove, nodded without speaking, and dissappeared again. A lamp was burning on the table.

The owner of the hut was sitting at the table tapping nervously with his fingers as he searched the mother's eyes.

"Come in," he said after a while. "Tatyana, go call Pyotr, and be quick about it."

The woman went out without looking at the mother, who took a seat on a bench opposite the man and glanced about. Her suitcase was nowhere to be seen. The hut was filled with dreary silence broken only by the occasional sputtering of the lamp. She was vexed by the anxious, frowning face of the muzhik that came and went hazily before her eyes.

"Where is my suitcase?" she suddenly asked, to her own consternation.

The muzhik shrugged his shoulders.

"It won't get lost," he answered, adding in lowered tones, "Back there at the station I said on purpose it was empty so that the girl would hear. But it's not empty. It's very heavy."

"Well, what of it?" asked the mother.

He got up and came over to her.

"You know that man?" he whispered, bending low.

"Yes," answered the mother in a firm voice, though the question had taken her by surprise. This brief word seemed suddenly to light up everything from within, making things clear. She sighed with relief and settled herself on the bench.

The muzhik gave a broad grin.

"I guessed it when you gave him a sign out there and he returned it. I whispered to him: was he acquainted with the one standing there on the veranda?"

"And what did he say?" asked the mother quickly.

"He said—there's lots of us. There's lots, he said."

The muzhik gazed quizzically into the eyes of his guest.

"That's a strong fellow for you!" he said with a smile. "And brave! He says right out—I'm the one! And he keeps on saying what he has to say no matter how much they beat him."

His voice, weak and hesitant, his incomplete face, and his pale, frank eyes, put the mother more and more at her ease. Gradually her alarm and dismay gave way to deep compassion for Rybin.

"The rascals! The brutes!" she exclaimed in bitter wrath, beginning to cry.

The muzhik moved away, mournfully shaking his head.

"The authorities have made people love them!"

Turning to the mother again, he said quietly, "Look, aren't there newspapers in the suitcase?"

"There are," answered the mother simply, wiping away her tears. "I was bringing them to him."

Frowning, he took his beard in his fist and stood staring into the corner.

"They got here to us, and so did the books," he said after a pause. "And we know that man—we saw him."

He stopped and thought for a second.

"What do you plan to do with it now—the suitcase?" he asked.

"Leave it with you," said the mother, looking at him challengingly.

He did not object or show any surprise.

"Good," he said.

With a nod of approval, he sat down at the table, combing his beard with his fingers.

The vision of Rybin, bloody and beaten, kept rising in her mind with merciless insistence, driving away all other thoughts. Pain and indignation drowned all other feelings, and she had no mind for the suitcase or anything else. Her tears flowed freely, but her face was stern, her voice steady as she said, "May they be accursed forever for the way they rob and insult human beings!"

"They're strong," replied the muzhik quietly. "They're very stong."

"And where do they get their strength?" exclaimed the mother angrily. "They get it from us, the common people—everything comes from us!"

She was annoyed by that muzhik, with his kind but enigmatic face.

"Yes," he drawled thoughtfully, "the wheel. . . ."

Suddenly he pricked up his ears and leaned towards the door.

"They're coming," he said.

"Who?"

"Friends, it seems."

His wife entered, followed by another muzhik who tossed his cap into the corner and came up to the table.

"Well?" he said.

The first one nodded.

"Stepan," said his wife from where she was standing by the stove. "Maybe our guest is hungry?"

"No, I'm not," said the mother.

The second muzhik turned to her.

"Let me introduce myself," he said in a quick, broken voice. "My name's Pyotr Yegorov Ryabinin, nicknamed the Awl. I understand a thing or two about your business. I know how to read and write and I'm not exactly a fool."

He took the hand she held out.

"Look, Stepan," he said, "Varvara Nikolayevna is a kind lady I suppose, but she says this business is foolish and harmful; says young chaps and students are filling the people's heads with nonsense. But you and me can see it was a dyed-in-the-wool muzhik they arrested today, and now look here—a middle-aged woman and not one of the gentlefolk, I take it. You aren't, are you?"

He spoke hurriedly but distinctly, without stopping for breath. His beard jerked nervously and his eyes kept wandering over the mother's face and figure. His clothes were torn and ragged and his hair was matted, as though he had just been in a fight and was jubilant with victory. The mother liked him for his spirit, and because he spoke his mind simply and frankly. She smiled at him as she answered his question, and he shook her hand again and laughed a dry, crackling laugh.

"It's clean work—fine work, Stepan," he said. "Didn't I tell you it comes from the people themselves? But that fine lady—she doesn't tell you the truth. She'd do herself harm if she told you the truth. Oh, I respect her of course—that goes without saying. She's a good soul and wants to help us—the least little bit—without doing herself any harm. But the common people, they plunge straight ahead without being afraid of hurting themselves. See the difference? They're always getting hurt, no matter what they do. So it's all the same to them. The only word they ever hear is 'Stop!' no matter which way they turn."

"I see," said Stepan with a nod; then, "She's worried about her suitcase."

Pyotr winked knowingly at the mother.

"Don't worry," he said reassuringly. "Everything'll be all right, mother. Your suitcase is at my place. Today when he told me about you—that you were mixed up in this business and knew that man—I said to him, 'Look sharp, Stepan! We mustn't make a mistake in a case like this.' But you seemed to guess who we were, too, when we were standing there next to you. No missing an honest mug when you see one—not many of them to be seen, to tell the truth. Don't worry about your suitcase."

He sat down next to her and looked at her inquiringly.

"If you'd like to get rid of what's in it, we'll be only too glad to help you. We could use those books."

"She wants to leave them all with us," said Stepan.

"That's fine, mother. We'll find a place for everything."

With a little laugh, he jumped to his feet and began walking up and down.

"A piece of rare luck! Though I suppose it's not so strange—the rope snapped in one place, held in another. The newspaper's a good one, mother, and doing a good job—taking the blinders off. The gentlefolk don't think much of it. I work for a lady seven versts from here—carpentering. She's rather decent—lends us books and all that. Sometimes you read something that's a real eye-opener! On the whole, we're grateful to her. But once I showed her this newspaper and you should have seen how she took it. 'Don't read that stuff, Pyotr,' she says. 'It's just a bunch of silly schoolboys that write stuff like that. You'll only get yourself in trouble by reading it—jail and Siberia,' she says."

He was silent again for a minute.

"That man today, mother—is he a relation of yours?"

"No," answered the mother.

Pyotr laughed noiselessly and shook his head as though very much pleased by something.

"He's not a relation, but I've known him for a long time and respect him like a brother—an elder brother!" the mother hastened to add, as though it were wrong of her to deny being related to Rybin.

She could not find the right words to express her feeling, and this hurt her so that she began to cry again. An oppressive, expectant silence reigned in the hut. Pyotr stood with bent head as though listening to something. Stepan was sitting with his elbows on the table, keeping up a nervous tapping. His wife was leaning against the stove, and the mother felt the woman's eyes fastened on her. The mother herself sometimes glanced into the young woman's face, an oval face, dark-complexioned, with a straight nose and a strongly modelled chin. Her greenish eyes were keen and attentive.

"So he's a friend of yours," said Pyotr musingly. "He's got a mind of his own, he has! Sets a high price on himself, and that's only fair. What a man, eh, Tatyana? And you say—"

"Is he married?" interrupted Tatyana, compressing the lips of her small mouth.

"A widower," said the mother sadly.

"That's why he's so brave," said Tatyana in a deep, rich voice. "A married man wouldn't choose such a path—he'd be afraid."

"What about me?" cried Pyotr. "Aren't I married?"

"Tut, tut, neighbour," said the woman with a crooked smile, avoiding his eyes. "What do you do? You just talk, and sometimes read a book or two. Little good it does the people for you and Stepan to sit whispering in some dark corner."

"Lots of people listen to me," protested the muzhik quietly, piqued by her contempt. "I'm, you might say, like yeast working here. You shouldn't say that. . . ."

Stepan looked at his wife without speaking and dropped his head again.

"Why does a muzhik get married?" asked Tatyana. "Because he needs a woman to work for him. Work doing what?"

"Haven't you got enough to do?" put in Stepan dully.

"What sense is there in this work? Just to go on living half starved from day to day? If you have children, there's no time to look after them with all the work, and still you don't even have enough to eat."

She went over to the mother and sat down next to her, talking on without complaint or sadness.

"I had two babies. One of them got scalded to death when it was only two years old, the other was born dead and all because of that accursed work. Has it brought me any happiness? I say there's no sense in a muzhik getting married. He only ties his hands when he might live as he pleases, fighting for a better way of life. Then he could go straight after the truth like that man. Isn't that so, mother?"

"Yes, it is," said the mother. "It is, my dear. Otherwise we can never hope to change this life."

"Have you got a man?"

"He died. I've got a son. . . ."

"Does he live with you?"

"He's in jail," said the mother.

The usual sorrow these words evoked was now mingled with pride.

"This is the second time they've put him in jail. And just because he sows God's truth among the people. He's young and good-looking and clever. It's him who thought up your paper. And it's him showed Mihailo Ivanovich the right path, though Mikhailo's twice as old as he is. Soon they'll hold a trial and my son will be sent to Siberia. But he'll run away and come back here to carry on this work. . . ."

As she spoke, the feeling of pride grew, giving rise to so vivid a picture of her hero that words to describe it came rushing to her lips, choking her. It was essential that she find something bright and reasonable to counterbalance the darkness of that day, a darkness whose senseless horror and shameless cruelty weighed her down. And in obedience to this demand of her wholesome spirit, she gathered all that was pure and bright into one great flame which blinded her with the intensity of its burning.

"There are lots of others like him, and more and more are being born, and to the end of their days they'll go on fighting for truth and freedom. . . ."

She threw caution to the winds, and while she did not mention any names, she told all that she knew about the secret work being carried on to release the masses from oppression. As she described people dear to her heart, she poured into her words all the strength and abundance of a love which life's vicissitudes had brought to so late a flowering. And she herself joyously beheld the people who rose in her mind's eye, illumined and glorified by her feeling.

"And this work is being carried on all over the earth, in every town and village. There is no limit to the strength of good people, and it is growing and will keep on growing until our hour of victory comes."

Her voice flowed on evenly, and she had no difficulty in finding words, which she slipped like coloured beads on to the strong thread of her desire to purge her heart of the blood and dirt of that day. She could see that these muzhiks were touched by what she said; they sat unstirring, with their eyes glued to her face, and she could hear the spasmodic breathing of the woman sitting beside her. And this strengthened her faith in what she was saying, and what she was promising these people.

"All those who have a hard life, all those who are worn out by need, all those who have been lawlessly ground down by the rich and the servants of the rich—all those must join the ones who die in jail and are tortured for the sake of their brothers. With no thought for themselves, they point the way to happiness for all people; with no attempt to deceive, they say—'hard is the path'—and they force no one to take it. But if a person has once taken his stand beside them, he will never leave them, for he can see that this is right—this is the road, and no other!"

She was thrilled to be doing something she had long wanted to do. She herself was telling the people the truth!

"You can safely follow such people. They won't be satisfied with some little gain. They won't stop till they do away with all deception, all greed and evil. They won't fold their hands until all people join together and cry with one voice, 'I'm the master! I myself will make laws that will be the same for all!'"

Suddenly she felt tired. She stopped talking and glanced at her listeners, realizing happily that her words had not been spoken in vain. The men went on looking at her expectantly. Pyotr crossed his arms on his breast and narrowed his eyes, a smile hovering about his lips. Stepan had one elbow on the table and was straining forward with his whole body as though he were still listening. His face was in shadow, and perhaps for that reason it now seemed more complete. His wife, who was sitting next to the mother, sat with her elbows on her knees, studying the floor.

"That's how it is," said Pyotr under his breath as he dropped down on the bench.

Stepan straightened up, looked at his wife, and stretched out his arms as though he wanted to embrace the whole company.

"If you once start that sort of thing," he began thoughtfully, "then of course you've got to throw your whole soul into it."

"No looking backwards," put in Pyotr diffidently.

"It seems to take in a lot of people," said Stepan.

"It takes in the whole world," said Pyotr.

XVIII

The mother leaned against the wall and threw back her head as she listened to the quiet words with which they appraised things. Tatyana got up, looked about her, and sat down again. There was a cold glint in her green eyes as she gazed in contempt and displeasure at the muzhiks. Suddenly she turned to the mother.

"You must have seen lots of sorrow in your day," she said.

"I have," replied the mother.

"I like to hear you talk—your words pull at the heart strings. When I hear you, I think—Oh God, what wouldn't I give to get a peep at the kind of people you talk about! And at life itself. What do we see here? We're just a flock of sheep, that's all! Take me for instance. I know how to read and write; I read books and do a lot of thinking—sometimes I can't even sleep nights for thinking. But what good is it? If I stop thinking I'll wither away for nothing, and if I go on, it'll be for nothing too."

There was mockery in her eyes, and at times she seemed to bite off her words like a thread. The muzhiks said nothing. The wind stroked the windowpanes, murmured softly in the chimney and rustled the straw on the roof. A dog howled. Now and again a drop of rain would strike the window. The light in the lamp flickered and almost went out, only to revive and go on burning brightly and steadily.

"When I heard you talk I kept saying to myself: that's what people were born for! And it's funny, but I seemed to know all that. But I never heard anything like it before and I never had such ideas myself."

"We'd better have something to eat, and put out the light, Tatyana," said Stepan slowly, with a frown. "People may notice that the Chumakovs' light's burning longer than usual tonight. It won't hurt us, but it might hurt her."

Tatyana got up and went to the stove.

"Yes, got to watch our step these days, neighbour," smiled Pyotr. "As soon as these newspapers are found. . . ."

"It's not myself I'm thinking about. It won't be any great loss if they arrest me."

His wife came over to the table.

"Get up," she said.

He got up and stood watching her lay the table.

"You and me, brothers, are worth just about five kopeks a bunch—and then only when there's a hundred to the bunch," he remarked with an ironic smile.

The mother felt sorry for him; the more she saw of him, the better she liked him. After her talk, she felt cleansed of the day's filth; she was pleased with herself and filled with good-will towards everyone.

"You're wrong," she said. "You mustn't accept the price put on you by those who suck your blood. You must set your own price—the price of what's inside you—the price set by your friends, not your enemies."

"What friends have we?" exclaimed the muzhik softly. "We're always fighting over a crust of bread."

"But I'm telling you we do have friends."

"Maybe, but not here," replied Stepan musingly.

"Why not try to find them here?"

Stepan thought for a moment before replying:

"H-m. Yes, I suppose that's what we ought to do."

"Sit down, supper's ready," said Tatyana.

As they ate, Pyotr, who seemed to have been greatly impressed by what the mother told them, grew lively again.

"You must leave early in the morning, mother, so as not to attract any notice," he said. "Ride right on to the next station without going through the town. Take the post chaise."

"Why should she? I'll drive her over," said Stepan.

"No, you mustn't. What if they say to you—'Did she spend the night?' 'Yes she did.' 'Where is she now?' 'I drove her to the station.' 'Aha! So you're the one helped her get way!' And off you go to jail. See? No sense in hurrying to jail. Everything in due time. Even the tsar will die when his hour comes, as the saying goes. But this way she simply spent the night, hired some horses, and went away. Plenty of people spend the night here, since our village is on the main road."

"Who taught you to be so timid, Pyotr?" asked Tatyana sarcastically.

"A man has to know all sorts of things, neighbour—when to be timid and when to be bold," said Pyotr, striking himself on the knee. "Remember the shaking-up they gave Vaganov when he was caught with that newspaper? Now you can't get him to take a book in his hands for love or money. But trust me, mother. I'm a sharp rogue and I'll hand round those newspapers and leaflets of yours—as many as you like and in just the right places. It's true that most of our folk can't read and they're afraid besides, but sometimes you get squeezed so tight you just can't help opening your eyes and asking what to do about it. And these leaflets tell you plainly: think! use your head! Some people who can't read know more than those who do—especially those who do have full bellies. I've tramped all over this part of the country and seen everything. We'll be able to manage, but we've got to use our brains and be sly if we don't want to get caught at the very outset. The authorities seem to have got wind that the muzhik's not feeling friendly—he's stopped smiling and isn't the least bit affectionate. On the whole, it looks as if he'd like to break off with the authorities. The other day in Smolyakovo—that's a village near here—they came to collect the taxes, and the muzhiks met them with clubs in their hands! The chief of police makes no bones about it—'So you're against the tsar, you rascals?' he yells. There was one muzhik—Spivakin by name—who talked right back to him. 'You can go to hell along with the tsar,' he says. 'What kind of a tsar is he if he steals the shirt off your back?' So that's how far things have gone, mother. Of course they threw Spivakin in jail, but not his words. Even the youngsters remember what he said. His words go on shouting away!"

He didn't eat anything, but went on talking in a swift undertone, glancing about with sparkling dark eyes, lavishly offering the mother his observations of peasant life as if they were coins spilled out of a purse.

Twice Stepan interrupted him to say, "You better eat something."

Both times Pyotr took up a piece of bread and his spoon and went on telling his stories with the ease of a lark singing a song. When supper was over he suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Well, time for me to go home. Good night, mother," he said as he shook her hand. "We may never meet again, but I want you to know I think all this is just fine—fine to have met you and listened to you. Is there anything in that suitcase of yours besides the papers? A woollen shawl? Good—a woollen shawl. Remember that, Stepan. He'll bring you your suitcase in just a minute. Come on, Stepan. Good night and good luck!"

After they had gone, the scurrying of the cockroaches could be heard. The wind swished over the roof and howled in the chimney, and a fine rain beat against the windows. Tatyana made a bed for the mother by pulling covers off the bunk on top of the stove and spreading them on a bench.

"He's a lively young man," said the mother. The other woman frowned at her.

"Makes a lot of noise but it doesn't mean much."

"And your husband?" asked the mother.

"He's all right—a good fellow. He doesn't drink. We get on together. But he has a weak character."

She drew herself up.

"What are we to do now?" she said after a short pause. "Shouldn't we revolt? Of course we should! That's what everyone is thinking, but each one thinks it to himself. And they ought to think it out loud. Somebody has to take the first step."

She sat down on the bench.

"You say young girls from the gentlefolk go in for this sort of thing—mingling with the workers and reading to them. Aren't they too good for that? Aren't they afraid?"

On hearing the mother's answer, she drew a deep breath, dropped her eyes and lowered her head.

"In one of the books I read, I came across the expression 'a meaningless life.' And I understood it at once. I know only too well what sort of a life that is—the meanings are there, but all disconnected—like sheep without a shepherd. That's what a meaningless life is. I'd run away from it without once looking back if I could. You feel so miserable when you understand things."

The mother could see this misery in the dry shine of her green eyes and in her pinched face, and she heard it in her voice. She wanted to comfort her.

"But you already see the way out, my dear. . . ."

"That's not enough. You have to know how," interrupted Tatyana softly. "Well, your bed's ready."

She went over to the stove and stood there without speaking—solemn, erect, thoughtful. The mother lay down in her clothes. Her body ached so with weariness that she let out a little moan. Tatyana turned down the lamp, and when the hut was filled with darkness she began to speak in low, even tones. Her voice seemed to be wiping something off the flat face of the darkness.

"I see you don't pray. I don't believe in God either. Or in miracles."

The mother turned over on her side. The fathomless darkness stared straight at her through the window, and little sounds, little stirrings, crept through the silence. She answered Tatyana fearfully, almost in a whisper.

"As for God—I'm not sure. But I believe in Christ. I believe in His words: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' I believe in that."

Tatyana remaîned silent. The mother could make out the vague outline of her straight figure, grey against the blackness of the stove. She stood motionless. The mother closed her eyes sorrowfully. Suddenly she heard the woman say coldly, "I can never forgive God or man for the death of my children. Never!"

Pelagea raised herself anxiously, her soul keen to the pain behind the words.

"You're young yet. There will be other children," she said gently.

"Never," whispered the woman after a pause. "Something's wrong with me. The doctor says I can't have any more children."

A mouse streaked across the floor. Something snapped loudly, cleaving the immobility of silence with the invisible lightning of sound. And again could be heard the rustling of the rain on the roof, rummaging in the thatch like thin and nervous fingers. And the dreary drip of the water marking the slow passage of the autumn night. . . .

As the mother drowsed off, she heard heavy steps outside, then in the entrance. The door was opened cautiously.

"Are you in bed, Tatyana?" came a man's voice.

"No."

"Is she asleep?"

"I think so."

A light flared up, flickered, and was swallowed by the darkness. The muzhik came over to the mother's bed and straightened the coat she had thrown over her feet. She was touched by his attention, and closed her eyes again with a smile. Stepan undressed without a word and climbed up on the bunk. Everything grew quiet.

The mother lay motionless, listening intently to the fluctuations of the dreamy silence, while before her eyes rose the blood-stained face of Rybin.

There was a stirring up on the bunk.

"See what kind of people go in for this? Elderly people who have worked all their lives and drunk their fill of grief. It's time they were resting, but they do this instead. You're young and clever—Oh, Stepan!"

"I've got to think it over first," answered the muzhik in his deep rich voice.

"I've heard that before."

They were still for a minute and then Stepan went on.

"Here's the way to begin: first talk to the muzhiks separately—Alexei Makov, for instance. He can read, he's got lots of spirit and has a grudge against the authorities.

Sergei Shorin, too—a clever muzhik. Knyazev's honest and not afraid. That's enough for a beginning. We want to get in touch with the kind of people she told us about. I'll take an axe and go off to town, as if I was setting out to earn some extra money chopping wood. We've got to be careful. She was right when she said a man must place his own price on himself. Take that muzhik today. He wouldn't give in if he stood before God Almighty. And that Nikita? Showed he had a conscience. Who'd have thought it."

"They thrash a fellow right in front of you and all you do is stand and gape!"

"Come, now! You ought to be glad we didn't strike him ourselves—that fellow!"

He went on whispering for a long time, sometimes lowering his voice so that the mother could hardly catch his words, then again speaking in deep, full tones. Often his wife would stop him.

"Hush! You'll wake her up!"

The mother fell into a heavy sleep that descended like a cloud and bore her away.

Tatyana woke her up when the grey dawn peeped through the windows, and the sound of the church bell, sleepily tolling the end of the night watch, came floating through the cold silence.

"I've lighted the samovar. Have a glass of tea; you'll be cold if you ride off as soon as you get up."

Stepan asked the mother her town address as he combed his matted beard. She found his face had improved during the night—had become more complete.

"How strange this should have happened!" he laughed as they were having tea.

"What?" asked Tatyana.

"Our getting acquainted. So simply."

"There's a wonderful simplicity in everything connected with our work," said the mother thoughtfully.

The man and wife were constrained as they parted with the mother. They spoke little, but showed concern for her comfort in innumerable small ways.

When she was seated in the post chaise, she reflected that Stepan would begin his work as cautiously and quietly as a mole, but he would be indefatigable. And his wife's complaints would always ring in his ears; her green eyes would keep their searing fire, and never as long as she lived would she be free of the vengeful, wolfish grieving of a mother for her dead children.

She remembered Rybin—his wounds, his face, his burning eyes and words. And her heart contracted with a bitter sense of helplessness in the face of such brutality. Throughout the journey back to the city the image of Mikhailo stood out against the dull background of the grey day. She saw him standing before her—sturdy, black-bearded, his shirt torn, his head bleeding, his hands tied behind him—a man filled with wrath and with faith in the truth he championed. The mother thought of the innumerable villages cringing upon the earth, of the people who were secretly awaiting the advent of justice, and of the thousands of people working all their lives silently, meaninglessly, and without hope of anything better.

And she saw life as a rolling, unploughed field, mutely yearning for the ploughman.

"Sow me with the seeds of truth and reason," it seemed to say to free, honest men, "and I will reward your labours a hundredfold!"

As she recalled the success with which her own efforts had been crowned, she felt a little thrill of joy, which she modestly suppressed.

XIX

Nikolai, his clothes in disorder, a book in his hands, opened the door to her.

"Back so soon?" he greeted her joyfully. "I didn't expect you."

His kindly eyes kept blinking behind his glasses. He helped her out of her things and gazed at her with a fond smile.

"They searched our house last night," he said, "and I was afraid something might have happened to you. But they didn't arrest me. If you had been arrested, they would surely have taken me."

He kept on talking as he led her into the dining-room.

"Of course I shall get the sack. But that doesn't upset me. I'm sick of sitting at a desk and counting the peasants who don't own horses."

The room looked as though some Goliath, in a fit of temper, had shaken the walls of the house until everything was topsy-turvy. Pictures were strewn on the floor, strips of wallpaper had been ripped off and hung in ribbons, in one spot a floor-board had been taken up, a window sill had been wrenched off, ashes from the stove had been scattered on the floor. The mother shook her head at the familiar sight, and looked at Nikolai intently, aware of some new quality in him.

The cold samovar stood on the table along with unwashed tea things; cheese and sausage lay on the paper instead of on plates, the cloth was covered with books, bits of bread and charcoal. The mother gave a short laugh, and Nikolai smiled ruefully.

"Of course I've added my share to the general chaos, but that's all right, Nilovna. I thought they might come back again, and that's why I didn't tidy up. Well, how was your trip?"

The question fell heavily on her heart. Once more the image of Rybin rose before her, and she was ashamed of not having told about him at once. Leaning forward, she began her account, trying to keep her composure and not to omit anything.

"They arrested him."

Nikolai's face fell.

"Really?"

The mother stopped him with a gesture and went on as though she were standing before Justice itself and protesting against the torture she had seen inflicted on a human being. Nikolai, gone quite pale, leaned back in his chair and bit his lip. Slowly he took off his glasses, put them on the table and passed a hand over his face as though wiping off an invisible cobweb.

His features grew suddenly sharp, his cheekbones stood out and his nostrils quivered. The mother had never seen him like this before, and it frightened her.

When she had finished, he got up and walked up and down with his fists deep in his pockets.

"He must be a great person," he muttered through clenched teeth. "He'll be miserable in jail; people like him take it hard."

He kept bearing down on his fists to quiet his nerves, but the mother was aware of his agitation, and shared it. He narrowed his eyes until they became like dagger points. When he spoke, it was with cold anger, and he kept walking up and down.

"Think of the horror of it! In order to keep their ruinous hold on the masses, a handful of numskulls beat and murder anyone they like! Savagery increases and cruelty becomes the law of the land! Just think of it! Some of them rage like wild beasts because they know they're beyond the law; they have a sensual craving for torture—the loathsome craving of unshackled slaves to give vent to their slavish feelings and animal instincts. Others are poisoned by the desire for revenge. Still others have been stupefied by the floggings they themselves have taken. The people are being corrupted, the entire people!"

He stopped and clenched his teeth.

"You become a brute in spite of yourself in this brutal life."

With a great effort he conquered his feeling and turned to the weeping mother almost calmly, a steady light in his eyes.

"But we mustn't lose any time, Nilovna! We've got to take ourselves in hand, my dear."

With a sad smile he went over to her and pressed her hand.

"Where is your suitcase?"

"In the kitchen."

"There are spies stationed at our gate. We can't carry out so much material without being noticed, and there's nowhere to hide it. I expect them to make another search tonight, and so however we may regret it, we've got to burn everything."

"Burn what?" asked the mother.

"Everything in your suitcase."

Suddenly realizing what he thought, she could not restrain a smile of pride, despite her sorrow.

"There's nothing there—not a single leaflet!" she said, and began to tell him all that had happened. Her strength came back gradually as she talked.

At first Nikolai frowned anxiously, but soon the frown was replaced by an expression of astonishment, and at last he interrupted her excitedly:

"But that's wonderful! What luck you had!" He seized her hands. "The faith you have in people is very touching, and I love you as if—as if you were my own mother!"

She smiled as she watched him, wondering why he had suddenly become so vivid and animated.

"Things look bright on the whole," he said, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "I've been enjoying myself these last few days, too—reading and talking to the workers, and studying them. They always leave you with such a clean, wholesome feeling. Splendid people, Nilovna! I mean the younger workers—so strong and sensitive and anxious to learn! When you look at them you can't help thinking that some day Russia will be the most democratic country in the world!" He paused and raised one hand as if taking an oath. "But I've gone musty, sitting over books and figures for almost a year. Monstrous! I'm used to living among workers, and I feel out of place anywhere else—tense, somehow, and under a strain. But now I'll live like a free man again. I'll be with them all the time and work with them. Do you understand? I'll be at the cradle of new ideas, in the presence of youthful, creative energy. Very simple and beautiful, and wonderfully stimulating. It makes a person young and strong. It's a rich way of life, Nilovna!"

He laughed gaily and self-consciously, and the mother understood his joy and shared it.

"And you? You, too, are a wonderful person!" exclaimed Nikolai. "How vividly you describe people, and how well you understand them!"

He sat down next to the mother, first averting his beaming face and running his hand through his hair to hide his embarrassment, but then turning to look at her as she gave him a simple and lively account of her experiences.

"A great piece of luck!" he exclaimed. "You could so easily have been arrested too, and instead. . . . Yes, the peasants seem to be waking up—and that's only natural. That woman—I can see her so clearly. . . . We need to send special people to work in the village. People? We don't have nearly enough! We need hundreds!"

"If only Pavel was free! And Andrei!" said the mother softly.

He glanced at her and lowered his eyes.

"It may be hard to hear me say it, Nilovna, but I know Pavel very well—he'll never choose to escape from jail. He needs that trial. He needs a chance to show his full stature, and he'll never refuse such a chance. And why should he? He'll run away from Siberia."

"Well, I suppose he knows best," she said with a sigh.

"I wish that muzhik of yours would hurry and pay us a visit," said Nikolai a moment later, peering at her through his glasses. "We must write a leaflet about Rybin for the peasants. It can't do him any harm, since he himself is so outspoken. I'll write it today and Ludmilla will print it in no time. But how will the leaflets reach them?"

"I'll take them."

"No, thank you," exclaimed Nikolai quickly. "But couldn't Vesovshchikov do it?"

"I might speak to him about it."

"Do. And teach him how."

"But what am *I* to do?"

"Oh, we will find work for you."

He sat down at his desk. She stole looks in his direction as she cleared the table, and noticed that the pen shook in his fingers. Sometimes the muscles of his neck jerked, and when he threw back his head and closed his eyes she could see the trembling of his chin. This worried her.

"It's ready," he said at last, getting up. "Here, hide this paper somewhere on your person—but if the gendarmes come they'll search you too."

"They can go to the devil," she answered complacently.

That evening Ivan Danilovich, the doctor, dropped in.

"Why are the authorities so upset all of a sudden?" he asked, pacing quickly up and down. "They searched seven houses last night. Where's my patient, eh?"

"He left yesterday," answered Nikolai. "Today is Saturday, and he couldn't miss his study circle."

"That's foolhardy—to sit in a study circle with a broken skull. . . ."

"I did my best to talk him out of it, but I couldn't."

"You can be sure he wanted to show off. 'Look at me—been wounded already!'" said the mother.

The doctor threw her a quick glance and frowned in mock severity.

"What a hardhearted creature you are!" he said.

"Well, Ivan, there's nothing to keep you here, and we're expecting guests. Get out! Nilovna, give him the leaflet."

"Another leaflet!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Yes. Take it and give it to the print shop."

"I've taken it and I'll give it. Anything else?"

"Nothing else. There's a spy standing at the gate."

"I saw him. There's one at my door too. Well, good-bye. Good-bye, you hardhearted woman! By the way, friends, the fight at the cemetery turned out to be a good thing after all. The whole town's talking about it. The pamphlet you wrote was a good one and came out just at the right time. I always say a good fight's better than a bad peace."

"All right. Get along."

"I wouldn't say you were very hospitable. Your hand, Nilovna. That boy certainly did a foolish thing. Do you know where he lives?"

Nikolai gave him the address.

"I'll go see him tomorrow. Nice chap, isn't he?"

"Very."

"We must take care of him. He's got a good head on his shoulders," said the doctor on his way out. "It's fellows like him who must form a true proletarian intelligentsia to take our places when we leave for those shores where I suppose there are no class distinctions."

"You've become very talkative of late, Ivan."

"That's because I'm in good spirits. So you're expecting to go to jail? Have a good rest!"

"Thanks, but I'm not tired."

The mother was pleased by their concern for this boy from the working class.

When the doctor had gone, she and Nikolai sat down to supper, talking quietly as they waited for their nocturnal visitors. Nikolai told her all about his comrades in exile, and about those who had escaped and were carrying on their work under assumed names. The bare walls threw back his words as though his tales of modest heroes sacrificing themselves to the great cause of remaking the world were too incredible to be accepted. A warm shadow fondly enveloped the mother, and her heart was filled with love for these unknown people. In her imagination they merged into one great, fearless individual who was moving slowly but surely ahead, clearing away the century-old crust of lies so that people might see the clear and simple truth of life. And this great truth, reborn, would rally all without exception, and would bring emancipation from greed and hate and falsehood—three monsters terrorizing and enslaving the world.

The feeling evoked by this image was similar to the joy and gratitude she had felt when kneeling before the icon at the end of a day less trying than others. Those rare days in the past were forgotten now, but the feeling to which they had given birth expanded, grew more radiant and joyous, took deeper root in her soul and blossomed forth as a living thing.

"And no gendarmes!" exclaimed Nikolai suddenly.

"They can go to the devil, I tell you," replied the mother with a quick glance at him.

"They can. But it's time for you to go to bed, Nilovna. You must be desperately tired. What a strong constitution you have! All this danger and excitement—and you take it so easily. But your hair is turning grey. Well, go get some sleep now."

XX

The mother was awakened by loud knocking at the kitchen door. Whoever it was kept pounding with patient insistence. It was still dark, and there was something alarming in this stubborn knocking. The mother quickly threw something over her shoulders and went into the kitchen, pausing at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Me," answered an unfamiliar voice.

"Who?"

"Open the door," implored the person in lowered tones.

The mother lifted the latch and pushed the door open with her foot. Ignat came in.

"So I didn't make a mistake!" he cried joyfully.

He was spattered with mud to the waist. His face was grey, his eyes sunken, and his curly hair stuck out in all directions from under his cap.

"We're in trouble," he whispered as he locked the door.

"I know."

The boy was surprised to hear this.

"How do you know?" he asked, blinking his eyes.

She gave him a brief explanation.

"Did they take those other two, your comrades?"

"They were away. They're recruits—went to report. Five were taken, including Uncle Mikhailo."

He drew a deep breath and added with a short laugh, "I was the only one left. They must be searching for me."

"How did you manage to get away?" asked the mother.

The door into the other room was pushed slightly open.

"Me?" exclaimed Ignat, sitting down on a bench and glancing round. "A minute or two before they came, the forester ran up and knocked at the window. 'Watch out, fellows,' he cried. 'They're after you.'"

He laughed quietly and wiped his face on his kaftan.

"Well, nothing could budge Uncle Mikhailo. 'Ignat,' he says. 'Be off with you to town—fast. Remember that elderly woman?' he says, scribbling a note while he talks. 'Here, take this to her.' So I creeps into the bushes, and sure enough, I hear them coming. There were lots of them crawling up on all sides, the devils. Surrounded our tar works. I lay low in the bushes and they passed me by. Then I got up and started legging it for all I was worth. I've been on the way two nights and one day without a halt."

She could see he was pleased with himself. There was a smile lurking in his hazel eyes and his full red lips kept twitching.

"I'll have tea for you in a minute," she said as she reached for the samovar.

"Here's the note."

With difficulty he raised his foot, grunting and grimacing with pain as he put it on the bench.

Nikolai appeared in the doorway.

"Good evening, comrade," he said, narrowing his eyes. "Let me help you."

He leaned over and began to unwind the dirty rags wound round Ignat's foot.

"Don't," exclaimed the boy, pulling his foot away and glancing in surprise at the mother.

"We'll have to rub his feet with alcohol," she said, ignoring his look.

"Of course," answered Nikolai.

Ignat snorted with embarrassment.

Nikolai picked up the note, smoothed the grey, wrinkled paper, and held it close to his eyes while he read it.

"Don't abandon our business mother and tell that tall gentlewoman not to forget to write more than ever about our business. I beg you good-bye. Rybin."

Nikolai dropped the hand holding the note.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured.

Ignat sat watching them and carefully working the dirty toes of his bare foot. The mother tried to hide the tears in her eyes as she brought a basin of water and kneeled down before him, reaching for his foot.

"Oh, you mustn't," he cried in fright, drawing his foot under the bench.

"Give me your foot and be quick about it!"

"I'll bring some alcohol," said Nikolai.

The boy drew his foot still further under the bench. "What's this, a hospital?" he muttered.

The mother began to unwind the rags on his other foot. Ignat sniffed loudly and kept twisting his neck, looking down at the mother.

"They beat Mikhailo Ivanovich," she said in a trembling voice.

"Did they?" exclaimed the boy quietly.

"Yes. He was already in a bad state when they brought him to Nikolskoye, and there the police sergeant and the chief of police struck him—in the face—and kicked him—until he was all bloody!"

"They know how to do it!" said the boy with a frown. His shoulders jerked. "I'm more afraid of them than a thousand devils. Did the muzhiks beat him too?"

"One of them struck him when the chief of police ordered him to. But the others were all right. They even took his side—cried out they had no right to beat him."

"Hm-m. The muzhiks are beginning to see who's on which side and why."

"There are sensible people among them too."

"There are sensible people everywhere. It's want makes them what they are. They're there all right, only it's hard to find them."

Nikolai brought a bottle of alcohol, added some charcoal to the samovar, and went out without speaking. Ignat watched him in silence.

"Who's the *barin*—a doctor?" he asked the mother when Nikolai had gone out.

"There are no *barins* here. We're all comrades."

"Seems funny to me," said Ignat, and his smile expressed doubt and embarrassment.

"What seems funny?"

"Things in general. At one end they bloody your nose for you, at the other they wash your feet for you. What's in between?"

The door opened and Nikolai said:

"In between are people who lick the hands of those who bloody your noses, and suck the blood of those whose noses get bloodied. That's what's in between!"

Ignat looked at him respectfully.

"Pretty near the truth, I guess," he said after a pause.

The boy got up and took a few firm steps.

"Like new feet," he said. "Thanks."

Then they went into the dining-room for tea, and Ignat told them about his life, speaking in a deep and solemn voice.

"I used to distribute our newspaper—I'm a great one for walking."

"Do many of the people in the country read it?" asked Nikolai.

"All those who can read, even if they're rich. Of course it's not from us the rich get the paper. They're smart enough to know the peasants will spill the blood of the landlords to wash the land out from under their feet. And as soon as that's done, they'll divide everything up so that there won't be any more landlords and hired men. That's clear—why else start a fight?"

He seemed offended, and looked at Nikolai inquiringly and distrustfully. Nikolai smiled and said nothing.

"If we fought against the whole world today and won, and then tomorrow there were rich and poor all over again, what would be the sense of it? No, thank you! You can't fool us—riches are like dry sand—they don't stay in one place; they go reaching out in all directions! Oh no, we won't have that!"

"Well, don't lose your temper," laughed the mother.

"The thing that worries me is how we can get that leaflet about Rybin's arrest to your people as soon as possible," said Nikolai thoughtfully.

Ignat pricked up his ears.

"Is there such a leaflet?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Give it to me. I'll take it," offered the boy, rubbing his hands.

The mother laughed quietly without looking at him.

"But you're tired and you said you were afraid," she said.

"Fear's one thing, business is another," he said in a businesslike tone, smoothing back his curly hair with a broad palm. "What are you laughing at? You're a fine one too!"

"You silly child!" exclaimed the mother, trying to suppress the happiness he made her feel.

"Humph—child!" he grunted.

"You aren't to go back there," said Nikolai, squinting at him genially.

"Why not? Where do I go?" asked Ignat, feeling uneasy.

"Someone else will take the leaflets; you just give him detailed instructions as to what he must do and how, will you?"

"All right," said Ignat in a tone of disappointment.

"We'll give you a new passport and find you a job as a forest warden."

The boy looked up quickly.

"What'll I do if the muzhiks come to steal firewood—catch them? That job wouldn't suit me," he said uneasily.

The mother laughed and so did Nikolai, and this made the boy feel hurt and uncomfortable again.

"You won't have to catch muzhiks," consoled Nikolai. "Don't worry about that."

"That's good," said Ignat with a smile of relief. "But I'd like to get a job in a factory. They say factory fellows are pretty clever."

The mother got up and went over to the window.

"Life's a funny thing—five laughs and five cries a day," she said musingly. "Well, are you through, Ignat? Time to get some sleep."

"I'm not sleepy."

"Come along, come along."

"You're very strict, aren't you? Well, I'm coming. Thanks for the tea . . . and your kindness. . . ."

As he got into the mother's bed he scratched his head and muttered to himself, "Now all these things'll smell of tar. . . . No sense in all this fuss. . . . I'm not sleepy. . . . How quick he was about those in between . . . the devils. . . ."

He was asleep before he knew it, snoring loudly, his mouth half open and his brows lifted.

XXI

That evening he was sitting opposite Vesovshchikov in a little basement room and saying mysteriously, "Four times at the middle window. . . ."

"Four?" asked Nikolai anxiously.

"First three—like this," and he tapped them out on the table: "One, two, three. Then wait, and one more."

"I see."

"A redheaded muzhik will open the door and ask: 'You come for the midwife?' And you say: 'Yes, for the factory owner's wife.' That's all. He'll understand."

They sat with their heads together, both of them strong, sturdy chaps, talking in lowered tones, while the mother stood watching them with her arms folded. She was amused by the mysterious knocks and passwords.

"They're hardly more than children," she thought to herself.

A wall lamp lighted up some battered pails and scraps of sheet iron lying on the floor. The room smelled of rust and paint and dampness.

Ignat was wearing a heavy coat made of shaggy material which he seemed to like. The mother caught him fondly patting the sleeve and twisting his neck to view the shoulders.

"Mere children," she thought. "Blessed children. . . ."

"That's all," said Ignat, getting up. "Don't forget to go to Muratov first and ask for grandad."

"I won't," answered Vesovshchikov.

But Ignat was not satisfied, and repeated all the knocks and signs and passwords before he finally held out his hand.

"Give them my regards," he said. "You'll see they're a good sort, those people."

He glanced down at his coat and touched it approvingly.

"Time for me to go?" he asked the mother.

"Will you find your way?"

"Sure. Good-bye, comrades."

And he went out, shoulders squared, chest high, his new hat tipped over one ear and his hands thrust bravely into his pockets. Wisps of curly blond hair waved at his temples.

"So now I've been given a job, too," said Vesovshchikov, coming softly over to the mother. "I was beginning to get bored, wondering what I ever ran away from jail for. Here I don't do anything but hide day and night, while there I was learning something. Pavel made us use our heads. What's been decided about their escape, Nilovna?"

"I don't know," she said with an involuntary sigh.

Nikolai placed a heavy hand on her shoulder and leaned towards her.

"Talk them into it," he said. "They'll listen to you. Nothing could be simpler. Look, here's the prison wall, and next to it a street lamp. Across the street is a vacant lot, on the left the cemetery, on the right, streets and buildings. Every day a lamplighter comes to clean the lamp. This time he puts a ladder against the wall, climbs up and fixes a rope ladder to one of the bricks in the top of the wall, lets it down into the prison yard and—there you are! Inside the prison they know when this'll happen and talk the common criminals into stirring up trouble, or else do it themselves to keep the guards busy while the runaways climb the ladder. One, two, three—and it's all over. Simple as that!"

He gestured as he set forth his plan, which seemed clear and simple and well thought out. She had always found him dull and plodding, and his eyes had looked on everything with sullen ill-will and distrust; now they seemed to be different eyes—they glowed with a warm even light as he tried to persuade her.

"Here's the point—they'll do it in the daytime. The daytime, mind you! Who'd ever suspect a prisoner of trying to break away in the daytime, when the whole prison's on its feet?"

"Mightn't they shoot?" asked the mother with a shudder.

"Who? There are no soldiers, and the guards only use their revolvers to drive nails with."

"It seems almost too easy."

"But you'll see. Do talk them into it. I have everything ready—the rope ladder, the hook for the top—and my landlord will be the lamplighter."

Someone on the other side of the door coughed, shuffled his feet, and rattled some scraps of metal.

"That's him," said Nikolai.

A tin bathtub showed in the doorway, and a hoarse voice muttered, "Get through there, you old devil. . . ."

Above the tub they caught a glimpse of a good-natured face with bulging eyes and grey hair and moustaches.

Nikolai helped him with the tub. Into the room stepped a tall stooped man who blew out his beardless cheeks in a raucous cough, spat, then greeted the guests in a hoarse voice.

"How do you do."

"Here, ask him!" exclaimed Nikolai.

"Ask me what?"

"About the escape."

"Ah," said the tinsmith, wiping his moustaches with stained fingers.

"She can't believe it's that easy, Yakov Vasilyevich."

"Can't, can't she? Then I guess she doesn't want to. But you and me want to, so we believe it!" said the smith calmly. Suddenly he bent double with coughing. When the spell was over he stood for some time in the middle of the room rubbing his chest and studying the mother with bulging eyes.

"Pavel and his comrades will decide that question," said the mother.

Nikolai dropped his head.

"Who's that—Pavel?" asked the smith as he took a seat.

"My son."

"Last name?"

"Vlassov."

He nodded, took out his tobacco pouch, and began filling his pipe.

"Heard of him," he said. "My nephew knows him. My nephew's in jail too—Yevchenko—heard of him? My name's Gobun. Soon they'll have all the young folks behind bars—all the more room for us old ones! One of the gendarmes told me they'd send my nephew to Siberia. Sounds like them, the swine!"

He turned to Nikolai and began drawing on his pipe, frequently spitting on the floor.

"So she doesn't want to? That's her business," he said jerkily. "When a fellow's free, he can start walking if he's tired of sitting, or start sitting if he's tired of walking. If they rob you, shut your eye, if they beat you, don't cry, if they kill you, there you lie. Everybody knows that. But I'll get that nephew of mine out, you can be sure of that."

The mother was puzzled by the way he barked out his crisp sentences, but she envied the conviction with which he had said those last words.

She was thinking of Nikolai as she went down the street with the cold wind and the rain in her face.

"How he has changed! It's unbelievable!"

As she remembered the smith, she murmured almost prayerfully, "So you see I'm not the only one who has taken a new hold on life!" And then her thoughts turned to her son. "If only he'd agree!"

XXII

As she was saying good-bye to Pavel in the prison office on the following Sunday, she felt him press a tiny ball of paper into her palm. She started as though it had burnt her hand, and glanced inquiringly into his face, but she found no answer there. Pavel's blue eyes were smiling their usual calm resolute smile.

"Good-bye," she said with a sigh.

He held out his hand again, and a shade of tenderness passed over his face.

"Good-bye, Mummy."

She waited, clinging to his hand.

"Don't worry, and don't be angry," he said.

These words and the stubborn line between his brows were her answer.

"Dear me," she muttered, lowering her head. "What are you saying. . . ."

She hurried out without another glance at him, so that he should not see the tears in her eyes and the trembling of her lips. All the way home the hand holding the paper seemed to ache, and her arm hung heavy, as if she had received a blow on the shoulder. As soon as she reached home she handed Nikolai the note and stood waiting for him to smooth out the paper with flutters of hope in her heart. But Nikolai did not justify them.

"I knew it," he said. "This is what he writes: 'We won't attempt an escape, comrades. We cannot. None of us can. We would lose our self-respect if we did. But try to help that peasant who was just arrested. He needs your help and deserves anything you can do for him. He's in a bad way here—fights with the authorities every day. He has already spent twenty-four hours in the dungeon. They'll torture him to death. All of us ask you to help him. Comfort my mother. Tell her everything, and she will understand.'"

The mother raised her head.

"What's there to tell? I already understand," she said in a trembling voice.

Nikolai quickly turned aside, pulled out a handkerchief, and blew his nose.

"I seem to have caught a cold . . ." he muttered, pushing up his glasses and pacing the floor. "The fact is, we wouldn't have had time anyhow."

"Very well, let them have a trial," said the mother with a frown, while sadness settled like fog on her heart.

"Here, I just received a letter from a comrade in St. Petersburg. . . ."

"After all, he can escape from Siberia, can't he?"

"Indeed he can. This comrade writes that the trial is to be held soon and the sentence has been decided on—exile for all of them. These crooks turn their own law courts into a farce. Just think, the sentence is decided in St. Petersburg before the trial is even held!"

"Don't bother, Nikolai Ivanovich!" said the mother firmly. "You don't have to explain or to comfort me. Pavel will do the right thing. He wouldn't make himself and his comrades suffer for nothing. And he loves me—you can see for yourself how thoughtful he is of me. Explain to her, he says; comfort her. . . ."

Her heart pounded and her head swam.

"Your son is wonderful," exclaimed Nikolai in an unnaturally loud voice. "I can't tell you how much I respect him."

"Let's think of some way to help Rybin," suggested the mother.

She wanted to do something this very minute—to go somewhere—to walk until she was worn out.

"Good," said Nikolai, still pacing the floor. "We need Sasha. . . ."

"She'll come. She always comes on the days I see Pavel."

Nikolai sat down on the couch next to the mother. He bowed his head in thought, bit his lip and twisted his beard.

"Too bad my sister is away. . . ."

"It would be fine if we could do it while Pavel is still there—it would make him happy," said the mother.

They said nothing for a while.

"But I don't see why he doesn't want to . . ." said the mother suddenly.

Nikolai jumped to his feet, but at that moment the bell rang. They glanced at each other.

"That's probably Sasha," said Nikolai softly.

"What shall we tell her?" asked the mother just as softly.

"Hm—"

"I feel so sorry for her."

The ring was repeated, this time less resolutely, as though the person standing there had not quite made up his mind. Nikolai and the mother both started for the door, but when they reached the kitchen Nikolai stepped aside.

"You had better go alone," he said.

"Has he refused?" asked the girl bravely as soon as the mother opened the door.

"Yes."

"I knew he would," said Sasha simply, but her face went white. She unbuttoned her coat, partly rebuttoned it, tried to slip it off her shoulders.

"Wind and rain—horrid weather," she said. "Is he well?"

"Yes."

"Well and happy," said Sasha softly as she stood studying her own hand.

"He writes we should try to free Rybin," said the mother without looking at the girl.

"Does he? If we do, I think we ought to use our old plan," said the girl slowly.

"I think so too," said Nikolai, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "Hullo, Sasha."

The girl held out her hand.

"Why shouldn't we? Everyone says it's a good plan."

"But who'll carry it out? We're all so busy."

"Let me!" said Sasha quickly, getting up. "I have time."

"All right. But you'll have to get in touch with the others. . . ."

"I will. I'll go right away."

She began to button up her coat again, this time with sure movements of her thin fingers.

"You might rest a bit first," said the mother.

"I'm not tired," replied the girl with a quiet smile.

Silently she shook hands and went out, as cold and severe as ever.

The mother and Nikolai went to the window and watched her cross the garden and disappear through the gate. Nikolai whistled softly, sat down at the table and began to write.

"She'll feel better if she has something to keep her busy," said the mother thoughtfully.

"Of course she will," replied Nikolai, then, turning to her with a smile on his kind face, "*that* cup seems to have passed you by, Nilovna. You've never suffered for the man you loved, have you?"

"Phooh!" said the mother with a wave of her hand. "The only thing I ever felt was fear they'd marry me off!"

"Were you never fond of anyone?"

"I don't remember. I suppose I was. I must have been fond of somebody, only I don't remember. My husband beat me so much he knocked everything that happened before my marriage out of my head," she finished simply, looking at him with sad composure.

Nikolai turned back to the table and the mother left the room for a moment. When she came back, he was lost in reminiscences.

"As for me, I had an experience something like Sasha's," he said, gazing at her affectionately. "I was in love with a girl—a wonderful girl. I was about twenty when I met her, and I've loved her ever since. I love her now as much as I did then—with all my heart, gratefully and forever."

From where she was standing next to him, the mother could see the warm clear light shining in his eyes. He had taken hold of the back of a chair and put his head on his hands, and he sat looking somewhere far away, his lean strong body stretching towards a vision as a flower stretches towards the sun.

"Why don't you marry her?" suggested the mother.

"She has been married four years."

"Why didn't you marry her first?"

He thought for a moment.

"Somehow it didn't turn out. Whenever I was free, she was in jail or in exile, and whenever she was free, I was in jail. That sounds like Sasha and Pavel, doesn't it? At last they sent her to Siberia for ten years—to one of the most distant regions. I wanted to follow her, but I was ashamed, and so was she. Out there she met another man—a fine chap—one of my comrades. They ran away together and now they are living abroad."

Nikolai took off his glasses, wiped them, held them up to the light and wiped them again.

"My poor friend!" exclaimed the mother lovingly, shaking her head. She felt sorry for him, but at the same time something about him made her smile, as a mother might smile at a child. He shifted his position and picked up a pen, waving it in rhythm to his words as he went on.

"Family life sucks the energy of a revolutionary—it can't help it. Children, insecurity, the necessity of working to feed the family. A revolutionary should store up energy, so as to expand his activities. The times demand it. We must always march ahead of everybody else, because we are the workers chosen by history to destroy the old world and build a new one. If we lag behind, giving in to our weariness or to the distraction of some little triumph, we are guilty of a wrong almost as great as betrayal of the cause. There is no one with whom we could march side by side without damaging our cause, and we must never forget that our task is not some little triumph, but complete victory."

His voice grew firm, his face pale, and his eyes shone with their usual serenity. There was another ring of the doorbell. It was Ludmilla, her cheeks red with cold, her body shivering in a coat too light for the season.

"The trial is to take place next week," she said testily as she took off her worn galoshes.

"Are you sure?" cried Nikolai from the other room.

The mother ran to him, uncertain whether it was fear or joy that caused such tumult in her breast. Ludmilla went with her.

"Yes, I am. At the courthouse they openly admit that the sentence has been decided on already," she said, a shade of irony in her deep voice. "How do you like that? Is the government afraid its officials will be too lenient towards its enemies? Is it afraid that in spite of all the time and energy it has spent distorting the minds of its servants, they may turn out to be decent after all?"

She sat down on the couch and rubbed her thin cheeks with her hands. Her eyes expressed utter contempt and her voice became more and more wrathful.

"Don't waste your energy, Ludmilla," said Nikolai in an effort to soothe her. "They can't hear you, you know."

.The mother listened to her, but understood nothing. One thought was uppermost in her mind: "The trial is next week!"

And suddenly she felt the approach of some inexorable, inhuman force.

XXIII

The mother lived in the shadow of gloom, suspense, and anxiety, for a day, two days, and on the third Sasha appeared.

23*

"Everything's ready. Today at one o'clock," she said to Nikolai.

"So soon?" he asked in surprise.

"Is it so soon? I only had to find clothes and a place for Rybin to go. Gobun did the rest. Rybin will have to run to the corner; Vesovshchikov will meet him there with a coat and a cap, and show him the way. I'll be waiting further on with other clothes."

"Good. But who is this Gobun?" asked Nikolai.

"You know him. Your study circle with mechanics used to meet in his room."

"I remember. A queer bird."

"He's a retired soldier—now a tinsmith—quite ignorant, but he has a deep-rooted hatred for all violence. And he's something of a philosopher," said Sasha thoughtfully, glancing out of the window. As the mother listened, a vague resolution was forming in her mind.

"Gubun wants to set his nephew free—remember Yevchenko? You liked him, he was always so spick and span."

Nikolai nodded.

"He's made all the arrangements," continued Sasha, "but I'm beginning to doubt that the attempt will be suceessful. It's to take place when the prisoners are having their airing, and I'm afraid when they see the ladder, many of them will want to use it. . . ."

Sasha closed her eyes and was silent. The mother drew nearer.

"And they'll spoil it for one another."

All three of them were standing at the window, the mother behind Nikolai and Sasha. Their quick speech roused mixed feelings in her breast.

"I'm going too," she said suddenly.

"Why?" asked Sasha.

"Don't go, my dear. Something may happen to you. Don't go," advised Nikolai.

The mother looked at him.

"No, I'm going," she said softly but firmly.

They exchanged quick glances.

"I understand," said Sasha with a shrug of her shoulders. Then she turned to the mother and took her by the arm.

"But you must realize there's no point in hoping," she said with a simplicity that touched the mother.

"I know, dear," answered the mother, drawing her close with a trembling hand. "But take me with you—I won't be in the way! I must go! I can't believe it's really possible to—to escape."

"She is going with us," said Sasha to Nikolai.

"Just as you say," he answered, dropping his head.

"But we mustn't be seen together. You go to the building lot; you can watch the prison wall from there. But what will you say if you are questioned?"

"I'll find something to say!" said the mother eagerly.

"Don't forget that the prison guards know you!" warned Sasha. "And if they see you there—"

"They won't see me!"

The mother was enlivened by a hope which had been smouldering in her breast for some time and now flared up feverishly.

"Maybe he'll escape too!"

An hour later she was in the lot near the prison. A sharp wind was blowing. It tugged at her skirts, attacked the frozen ground, rocked the rickety fence about the garden she was passing, and hurled itself with full force at the prison wall. It picked up human cries from the prison yard and whirled them into the sky, where the racing clouds gave passing glimpses into the blue depths beyond.

Behind the mother was the garden, before her the cemetery, while some seventy feet to her right was the prison. Near the cemetery a soldier was lunging a horse, while another soldier stood next to him stamping the ground, shouting and laughing and whistling. There was no one else near the prison.

She walked past them to the fence enclosing the cemetery, glancing surreptitiously behind her and to her right. Suddenly she felt her knees give way and her feet felt as if they were frozen to the earth. Around the corner came a stooped lamplighter with a ladder over one shoulder, hurrying as lamplighters do. Blinking with fright, the mother looked at the soldiers: they were standing in one spot, with the horse racing round them; she looked at the man with the ladder—he had already placed it against the wall and was climbing leisurely. On reaching the top, he swung out his arm, then quickly descended and disappeared round the corner. The mother's heart raced; the seconds dragged past. The ladder was almost invisible against the dark background of the prison wall, stained and discoloured as it was, with spots where broken plaster revealed the bricks beneath. Suddenly a dark head appeared above the wall, then a body which straddled the wall and crawled down the other side. A second head in a shaggy cap appeared; a dark ball rolled across the ground and vanished round the corner. Mikhailo straightened up, glanced about, shook his head. . . .

"Run, run!" whispered the mother, stamping her foot.

There was a ringing in her ears and she heard loud cries. A third head appeared over the wall. The mother clutched at her breast and watched with bated breath. The blond head of a beardless youth had shot up as though tearing loose, but it instantly disappeared behind the wall again. The cries grew louder and more excited and the wind carried the thin shrilling of whistles through the air. Mikhailo walked the length of the wall. Now he had passed her and crossed the open space between the prison and the houses of the city. If only he would walk faster and not hold his head so high! Anyone who had once seen his face would be sure to remember it.

"Hurry, hurry!" she whispered.

Something banged on the other side of the prison wall and she could hear a shattering of glass. One of the soldiers stood with his feet dug into the ground, pulling on the horse's rope; the other had raised his hand to his mouth and was shouting toward the prison. When he had finished, he turned his ear to the wind to catch the answer.

The mother stood at strained attention, turning her head in all directions, and while her eyes saw everything, they believed nothing. What she had imagined as being so complicated and fraught with danger turned out to be quick and simple, and this quickness overwhelmed her and dulled her wits. Rybin had disappeared; a tall man in a long coat came walking down the street and a young girl ran ahead of him. Three prison guards dashed round the corner of the prison, keeping close to each other, their right arms extended. One of the soldiers ran to meet them, the other danced about the horse, trying to jump on its back, but the unruly animal leaped into the air, and everything else seemed to leap with it. The blowing of the whistles was repeated with frantic insistence. Their desperate shrilling forced her to a realization of the danger; she shuddered and walked along the fence of the cemetery, keeping her eye on the guards, but they and the soldiers disappeared round another corner of the prison. Soon they were followed by a man in an unfastened coat whom she recognized as the assistant head of the prison. Policemen appeared on the scene and a crowd began to gather.

The wind swept down in a whirling dance, as though rejoicing, bringing to the mother's ears tattered shreds of cries and whistles. . . . The turmoil made her happy, and she quickened her steps.

"He could have done it just as easily," she thought.

Suddenly two policemen dashed round the corner.

"Stop!" cried one of them, out of breath. "Have you seen—a man—with a beard?"

She pointed in the direction of the gardens.

"He ran over there," she said calmly. "Why?"

"Yegorov! Blow your whistle!"

The mother went home. She felt sorry about something, had a feeling of bitterness and regret. A droshky passed her as she reached the street after crossing the lot. She glanced inside and saw a young man with a blond moustache and a pale, tired face. He saw her too. He was sitting sidewise, and for that reason his right shoulder was higher than his left.

Nikolai greeted her joyfully.

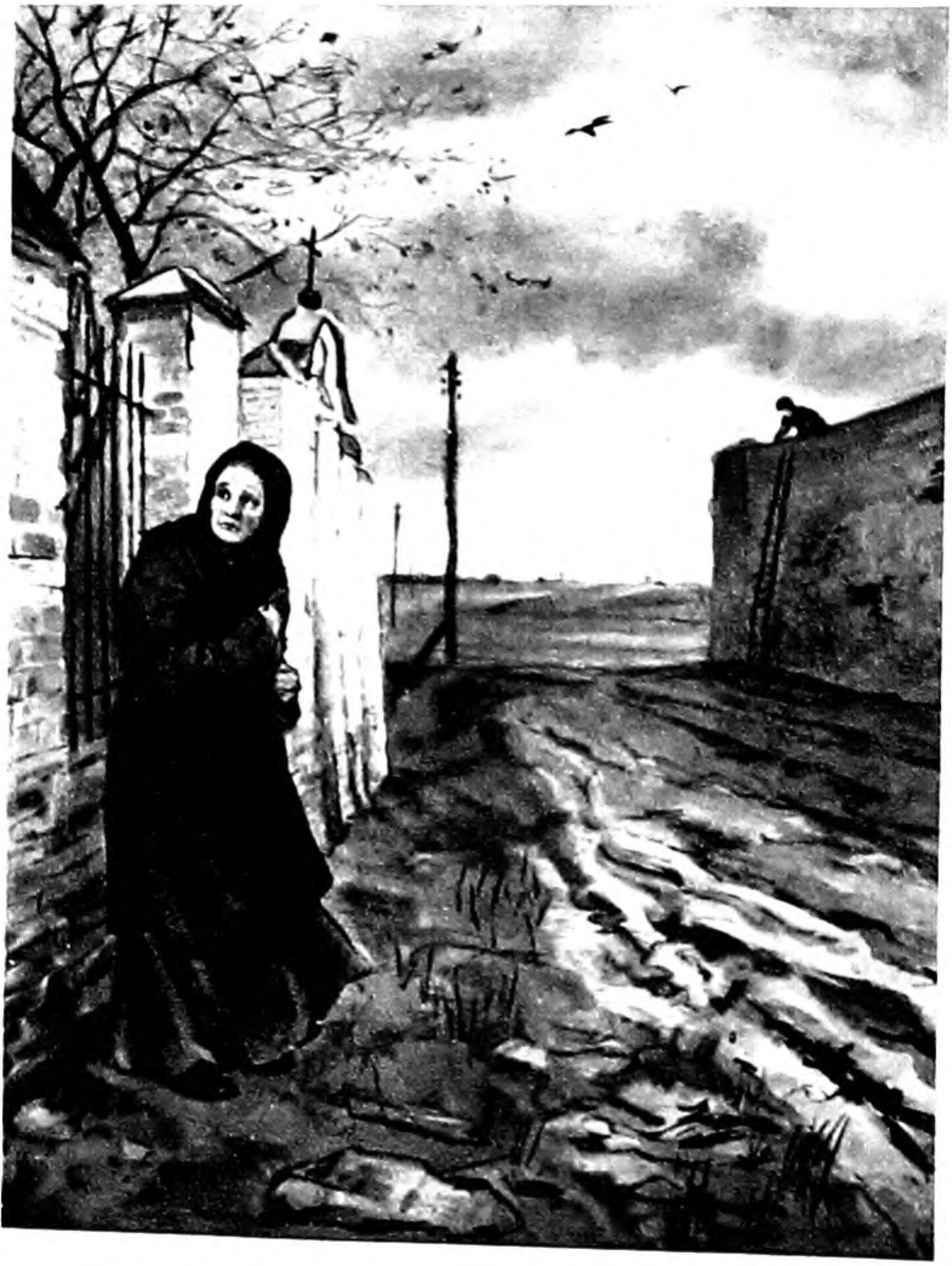
"Well, what happened?"

"It came off all right."

She gave him an account of the escape, trying to remember all the details. But she spoke as though retelling another's tale, the truth of which she doubted.

"Luck is with us," said Nikolai, rubbing his hands. "The devil only knows how worried I was that something might happen to you. Listen, Nilovna, take the advice of a friend and stop dreading that trial. The sooner it comes off, the sooner Pavel will be free. Perhaps he'll make his escape while on his way to exile. As for the trial, it will be something like this. . . ."

And he went on to describe the procedure. As he spoke she realized there was something he himself was afraid of, despite his efforts to comfort her.



"Are you afraid I'll say something I shouldn't in court?" she asked suddenly. "Or that I'll ask them for something?"

He jumped up, waving his hands deprecatingly.

"Of course not!" he said in an offended tone.

"I am afraid, I don't deny it. But I don't know what I'm afraid of." She stopped speaking, and her eyes roved over the room.

"Sometimes I'm afraid they'll talk rough to Pavel: 'You muzhik, you!' they'll say—'You son of a muzhik! What are you up to?' Pavel's a proud boy, and he'll answer them back. Or Andrei'll make sharp remarks. The others are hotheaded, too. And if they don't stand for it—and give them a different sentence—and we'll never see them again?"

Nikolai frowned without answering and pulled at his beard.

"I can't help thinking such thoughts," she said softly. "That's why the trial's so—so fearsome! Once they begin looking at everything and weighing things! So very fearsome! It's not the punishment that frightens me, it's the trial. I don't know how to put it. . . ."

She was sure Nikolai didn't understand her, and that made it all the harder to put her fears in words.

XXIV

Her dread was like a mould growing inside her and choking her. She could hardly lift her head or walk erect as she made her way to the courthouse on the day of the trial.

Acquaintances from the factory settlement greeted her; she merely nodded to them as she passed through the sullen crowd. In the corridors and the courtroom she met relatives of those on trial who also spoke to her in lowered voices.

She felt that words were superfluous; she could not understand them. Everyone was afflicted by the same grief. The mother saw this, and it only oppressed her the more.

"Sit down," said Sizov, moving over on the bench.

She sat down obediently, straightened out her skirt and looked about her. Green and red dots and stripes and fine yellow threads danced before her eyes.

"It's your son who brought our Grisha to this," muttered a woman sitting beside her.

"Stop that talk, Natalya," said Sizov sullenly.

The mother looked at the woman. She was Samoilov's mother, and next to her sat her husband, a bald, good-looking man with a lean face and flowing red beard. He narrowed his eyes as he kept staring ahead, and his beard trembled with the strain he was under.

A dull light poured into the courtroom through high windows which were covered with snow on the outside. Between the windows hung a portrait of the tsar in a shiny gilt frame, the sides of which were hidden by the folds of heavy maroon window hangings. In front of the portrait stood a table covered with green baize which extended almost from wall to wall. Two wooden benches were placed behind bars against the right wall, while against the left stood two rows of armchairs upholstered in maroon. Silent attendants in uniforms with green collars and gold buttons down the front moved back and forth. The murky air was full of whispering and the smell of medicine. All this—the colours and shine, the sounds and smells—hurt her eye and ear and entered her body as she breathed, filling her with an empty, aching fear.

Suddenly someone spoke in a loud voice. The mother started, and when everyone else stood up, she did too, catching hold of Sizov's hand.

A high door on the left opened and a bespectacled old man came hobbling in. Thin white side-whiskers shook on his grey jowls. His clean-shaven upper lip was sucked against a toothless gum, while his chin and jaws rested on the high collar of his uniform, giving the impression that there was no neck inside. He was supported by a tall young man with a ruddy round porcelain face. Behind them came three men in uniforms trimmed with gold braid, and three in civilian clothes.

They took a long time to seat themselves at the long table, but when this was done a man with an apathetic beardless face leaned over and began to move his fleshy lips as he whispered to the old man. The old man sat strangely stiff and erect as he listened; behind his spectacles the mother could detect two colourless little dots.

At the writing desk at one end of the table stood a tall, baldish gentleman who cleared his throat as he leafed through documents.

The old man leaned forward and began to speak. The first words of his sentences were enunciated clearly, but the rest came out in an incoherent jumble.

"I proclaim. . . . Lead them. . . ."

"Look!" whispered Sizov, nudging the mother as he stood up.

The door behind the bars was opened, a soldier with a bared sword over his shoulder came in followed by Pavel, Andrei, Feodor Mazin, the two Gusev brothers, Samoilov, Bukin, Somov, and five more young people whose names the mother did not know. Pavel smiled at her, and Andrei grinned and nodded; somehow their smiles, their lively faces and gestures seemed to lighten the strained, affected atmosphere in the courtroom; the dazzle of gold braid faded away; the mother's courage was revived by the confidence and vitality the prisoners brought with them. A quiet murmur came from the back benches, where up to now people had been waiting dejectedly.

"They're not afraid!" Sizov whispered, while Samoilov's mother began to sniffle.

"Silence!" came the stern injunction.

"I must warn you . . ." said the old man.

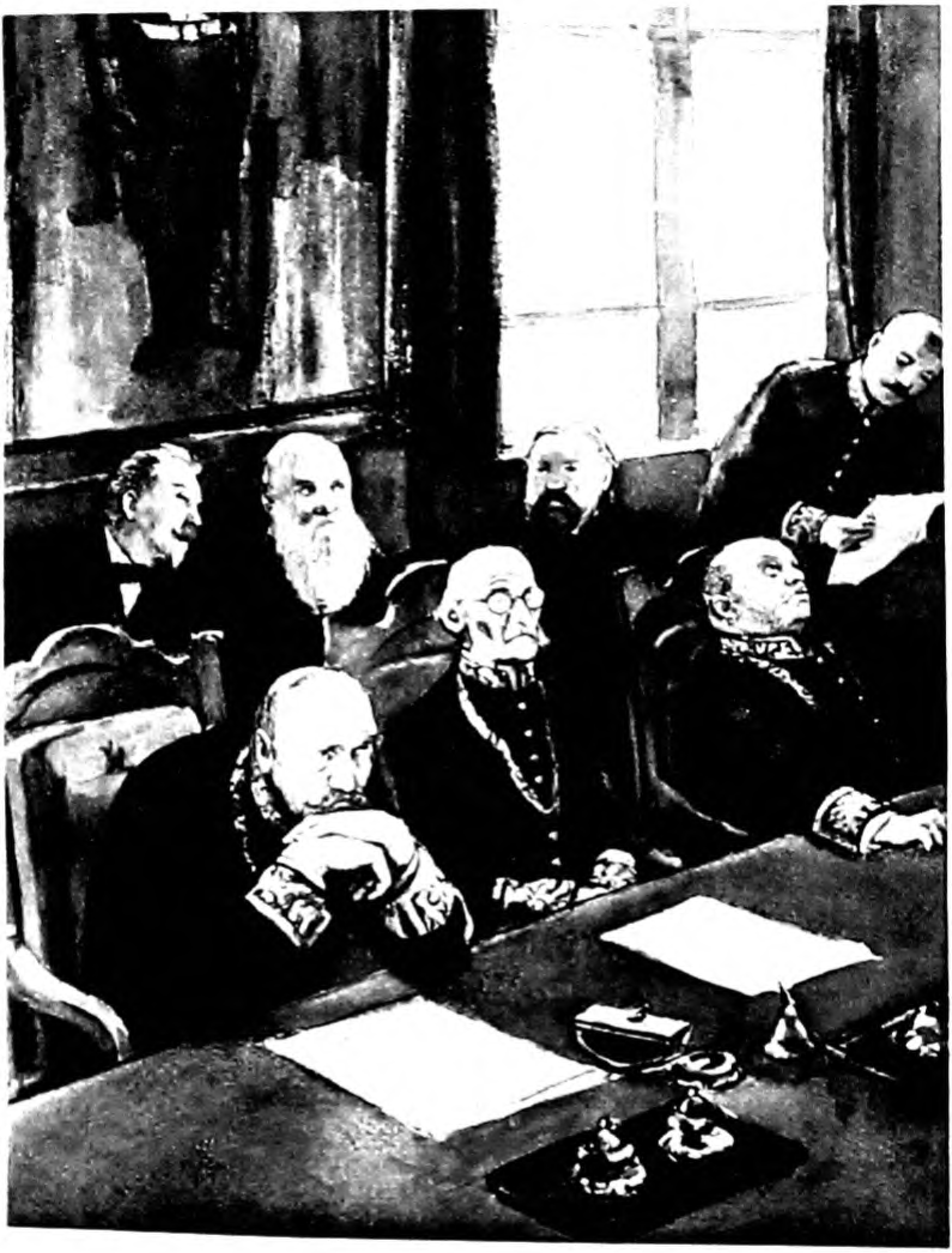
Pavel and Andrei were sitting beside each other on the first bench, along with Mazin, Samoilov and the Gusevs. Andrei had shaved his beard but let his moustaches grow, and they hung down and made his round face look like a cat's. There was something new in his expression—something sharp and caustic about his mouth, something lowering in his eyes. A black line had appeared on Mazin's upper lip, and his face had rounded out. Samoilov was as curly-headed as ever, and Ivan Gusev grinned just as broadly.

"Ah, Feodor, Feodor," groaned Sizov, lowering his head.

The mother listened to the inarticulate questions which the old man put to the prisoners without looking at them, his head resting motionless on his collar. She listened to the calm, brief answers of her son, and felt that the senior judge and his assistants could not be cruel to him. As she studied the faces at the long table in the effort to guess the outcome of the trial, she became conscious of a growing hope in her heart.

The porcelain official read a document in an impassive voice, so boring that the audience sat as if entranced. Four lawyers carried on an animated conversation with those on trial. Their movements were quick and strong and they reminded her of big black birds.

The armchair on one side of the old man overflowed with the obesity of a judge whose tiny eyes were buried in fat. On the old man's other hand sat a round-shouldered judge with



reddish whiskers and a pale face. He rested his head wearily on the back of the chair and half closed his eyes, letting his thoughts wander. The prosecutor, too, wore an expression of weariness and boredom. Behind the judges sat the Mayor, a stout, imposing man who kept stroking his cheek; the Marshal of the Nobility, grey-haired and red-cheeked, with a long beard and large, amiable eyes; and the Head of the Volost, whose huge belly seemed to cause him some embarrassment, for he kept covering it with the tails of his coat, which kept slipping off.

"There are neither criminals nor judges here," came Pavel's firm voice. "There are only captives and those who took them captive."

There was a hush. For a few seconds the mother could hear nothing but the hurried scratching of a pen and the beating of her own heart.

The senior judge, too, seemed to be listening and waiting for what would follow. His assistants stirred. At last he said:

"Hm-m. Andrei Nakhodka! Do you plead guilty?"

Andrei got up slowly, squared his shoulders, tugged at his moustaches and looked at the old man from under lowered brows.

"How can I plead guilty?" he replied in his slow melodious voice, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I haven't killed anyone or stolen anything. I'm simply against a manner of life that leads people to rob and kill each other."

"Be more brief in your answers," said the old man with an effort.

A murmur came from the back benches. People began to whisper and move about, as if freeing themselves of the web of words the porcelain fellow had woven about them.

"Hear what they're saying?" whispered Sizov.

"Answer, Feodor Mazin. . . ."

"No, I won't," said Feodor, jumping to his feet. His face was flushed, his eyes were bright, and for some reason he held his hands behind his back.

Sizov gasped and the mother's eyes widened in amazement.

"I refused to have a lawyer to defend me and I refuse to say anything. I consider this trial unlawful! Who are you? Have the people given you the right to judge us? No, they have not! And I refuse to recognize your authority!"

He sat down and hid his flushed face behind Andrei's shoulder.

The fat judge nodded to the senior judge and whispered something in his ear. The pale-faced judge opened his eyes, cast a sidelong glance at the prisoners, and jotted something in pencil on the paper lying before him. The Head of the Volost shook his head and shifted his feet, the more easily to rest his belly on his knees and cover it with his hands. Without turning his head, the old man twisted his whole body toward the pale-faced judge and moved his lips soundlessly. The latter bowed his head. The Marshal of the Nobility said something to the prosecutor, and the Mayor, still stroking his cheek, tried to catch his words. Then the senior judge began to speak again in his dull voice.

"Hear how he gave it to them?" whispered Sizov to the mother in surprise. "Why, he was the best of them all!"

The mother smiled, perplexed. Everything that was happening seemed to her a tiresome and unnecessary introduction to the dreadful thing that was soon to take place, crushing them all with its cold horror. But the words of Pavel and Andrei had sounded as fearless and strong as though they had been spoken in their little house in the workers' settlement rather than in this courtroom. She had been roused by Feodor's impassioned outburst. Something courageous was taking place at this trial, and judging by the animation of the people sitting behind her, she was not the only one aware of it.

"What is your opinion?" asked the old man.

The bald-headed prosecutor rose and placed one hand on the desk as he made a quick speech, citing figures. There was nothing terrifying in his voice.

At the same time the mother had a dry, prickly sensation in her heart. She was vaguely aware of something hostile in the air which did not shake its fist and cry out, but kept growing subtly and imperceptibly. It hovered in the vicinity of the judges, seeming to engulf them in an impenetrable cloud which insulated them from everything going on outside. She looked at the judges and could not understand them. They did not become angry with Pavel and Feodor as she has expected, they did not insult them, and it seemed to her they attached no importance to the questions they asked. Their attitude was detached and they had to force themselves to listen to the answers, as if they knew everything beforehand and nothing made any difference.

Now a gendarme was standing before them and saying in a deep bass voice:

"Pavel Vlassov is said to be the chief instigator. . . ."

"What about Nakhodka?" asked the fat judge languidly.

"He, too. . . ."

One of the lawyers got up.

"May I have a word?" he said.

"Are there any objections?" asked the old man.

All of the judges seemed to be suffering from ill health. An unwholesome weariness was expressed in their manners and voices, and their faces showed this same weariness and boredom. It was clear that they found all this a strain—their uniforms, the courtroom, the gendarmes, the lawyers, the necessity of sitting in their armchairs asking questions and listening to proceedings.

The yellow-faced officer of her acquaintance was now standing in front of them and telling what he knew about Pavel and Andrei in a loud, drawling voice.

"It's not much that you know," thought the mother as she listened.

She looked at the people behind the bars without fear for them, without pitying them. She could not pity them. She could only feel love and astonishment—a quiet astonishment, a poignant love. There they sat against the wall, young and strong, paying little attention to the dull talk of witnesses and judges and the arguments of the lawyers with the prosecutor. Occasionally one of them would laugh sarcastically and make a remark to his comrades, over whose faces would flit the same mocking smile. Pavel and Andrei whispered almost uninterruptedly to one of the lawyers for the defence whom the mother had seen at Nikolai's the night before. Mazin, who was more restless and excited than the others, listened to their conversation. Sometimes Samoilov would say something to Ivan Gusev, and Ivan would nudge him and try so hard not to laugh that his face would grow red and his cheeks swell up, and he would have to hang his head. Twice he actually exploded, and then he sat for some time all hunched up, trying to take himself in hand. The prisoners were young, and their youth defied every effort to suppress its lively fermentation.

Sizov touched her lightly on the elbow. She turned and saw that he was pleased, but a bit anxious.

"Just look how bold those youngsters are!" he whispered. "Very lords!"

In the courtroom the witnesses went on talking hurriedly and colourlessly, the judges reluctantly and disinterestedly. The fat judge yawned, covering his mouth with a podgy hand; the one with the red whiskers was paler than ever, and every once in a while he would press a finger to a temple and stare painfully at the ceiling with unseeing eyes. Once in a while the prosecutor would jot down a note and then go on talking soundlessly to the Marshal of the Nobility, who would stroke his grey beard, roll his large fine eyes, smile and arch his neck. The Mayor sat with his legs crossed, staring at his fingers as he drummed with them on one knee. The Head of the Volost, who had anchored his belly on his knees and encircled it with his arms, seemed to be the only one listening to the monotonous hum of voices, unless the old man, sitting as motionless as a weathercock on a windless day, could be accorded the same honour. This lasted so long that the audience grew numb with boredom.

"I declare . . ." said the old man, standing up. The rest of the words were garbled behind his thin lips.

Sighs, exclamations, coughing, and a scraping of feet could be heard. The prisoners were led out. They smiled and nodded to relatives and friends.

"Don't lose heart, Yegor!" called Ivan Gusev.

The mother and Sizov went out into the corridor.

"Shall we go to the inn for a cup of tea?" asked the old man. "We have an hour and a half."

"I don't really want to."

"Neither do I. What do you think of those lads, eh? They sit up there as if they were the only people on earth, and all the rest just didn't mean a thing. That Feodor!"

Samoilov's father came over to them, holding his hat in his hands.

"Did you see my Grigori?" he said with a rueful smile. "He refused any defence and wouldn't even talk to them. He was the first to do that. Your son was for having lawyers, Pelagea, but mine says nothing doing. Four of them refused after that."

His wife stood next to him. She kept blinking back the tears and wiping her nose with a corner of her handkerchief.

"A funny thing," went on Samoilov, holding on to his beard and staring at the floor. "When you look at them, the rascals, you can't help thinking it's a pity they got themselves into this mess. And then again you think maybe they're right after all! Especially when you see how their numbers are growing at the factory. The police arrest one after another, but they keep multiplying like fish in the river. It makes you think maybe the strength's on their side."

"It's hard for us to make head or tail of such things, Stepan Petrovich," said Sizov.

"Yes, it's hard," agreed Samoilov.

"They're a healthy bunch, the wretches," said his wife with a loud sniff.

Then she turned to the mother with a smile on her broad flabby face.

"Don't be angry with me, Nilovna," she said. "A little while ago I blamed your son for it. But the devil only knows who's most to blame. Did you hear what the gendarmes and the spies said about our Grigori? He did his share too, the redheaded scamp!"

She was proud of her son without perhaps appreciating her own feeling, but the mother appreciated it, and replied with a kind smile and heartfelt words.

"Young hearts are always quicker to catch the truth. . . ."

People wandered through the corridor and formed groups talking in low excited voices. Almost no one stood alone, and all the faces expressed an eagerness to talk, ask questions, hear what others had to say. They walked back and forth in the narrow white lane between the walls as though blown by a strong wind, and they seemed to be searching for something solid to which they could anchor.

Bukin's elder brother, a tall fellow as fair-skinned as himself, was waving his arms vehemently as he tried to prove something.

"That Klepanov, Head of the Volost, has no business being here. . . ."

"Keep your mouth shut, Konstantin," said the little old man who was his father, as he darted cautious glances about.

"No, I won't! There are rumours that he killed one of his clerks last year on account of the clerk's wife; he lives with her. What do you call that? Besides, everybody knows he's a thief. . . ."

"For God's sake, Konstantin!"

"That's right," said Samoilov. "That's right. You can't say the trial's been a fair one. . . ."

Bukin heard him and came over, drawing the others with him. His face was red and he kept waving his arms.

"When it's a matter of murder or theft, people are tried by a jury—by the common people—peasants, towns-people, workmen," he shouted. "But when people go against the authorities, it's the authorities themselves who try them! What do you call that? If you insult me and I give you a sock in the jaw and then you are the one to pass judgment, of course you'll find me guilty. But who was the first one to be in the wrong? You!"

A grey-haired, hook-nosed guard with a chest full of medals broke up the gathering and shook his finger at Bukin.

"Stop shouting. You're not in a tavern!" he said.

"That's all right. I understand. But if I was to strike you and then I was the judge, who do you think. . . ."

"I think I had better turn you out of here, that's what!" said the guard threateningly.

"Turn me out? What for?"

"For making so much noise. Put you out in the street."

Bukin looked at those about him.

"The only thing they want is to make people shut up!" he said in lowered tones.

"Sure. What did you think?" cried the old man roughly.

Bukin shrugged his shoulders and began to speak more softly.

"And why shouldn't the people be allowed to attend the trial? Why only relatives? If your trial is fair, let everybody hear it! What you afraid of?"

"The trial's not fair, there's no doubt about that," asserted Samoilov loudly.

The mother wanted to tell him what she had heard Nikolai say about the trial, but she had not understood everything and had forgotten some of the words. In trying to recall them, she walked away and noticed that a young man with a light moustache was watching her. He kept his right hand in the pocket of his trousers, and this made his left shoulder lower than the right, a peculiarity which seemed somehow familiar. But he quickly turned his back and she forgot him, engrossed as she was in her own thoughts.

But a minute later she heard someone ask quietly:

"Her?"

"Yes," was the answer.

She glanced round. The man with the lifted shoulder was standing nearby talking to a dark-bearded youth in a short coat and knee-boots.

Disturbed, she tried to place him, but could not. She had an irresistible desire to tell people about her son's cause. She wanted to hear what they would say against it, so that she could judge what the verdict would be.

"Is that the way to conduct a trial?" she began warily, addressing Sizov. "They spend all their time trying to find out who did what, without paying any attention to why they did it. And they're all old men. Young people should be tried by young people."

"They should," agreed Sizov. "It's hard for us to understand such things, very hard." He shook his head thoughtfully.

The guard opened the door of the courtroom.

"Relatives, show your tickets!" he cried out.

"Tickets!" commented someone caustically. "As if it was the circus!"

A vague irritation could be detected among the people. They were more talkative, and less tense, and they kept getting into arguments with the guards.

XXV

Sizov mumbled something as he resumed his place on the bench.

"What's that?" asked the mother.

"Nothing special. The people are fools. . . ."

A bell was rung.

"Order in the court. . . ."

Everybody stood up again as the judges filed in and took their places in the same order as before. The prisoners were led to their seats.

"Grit your teeth!" whispered Sizov. "The prosecutor is going to make his speech now."

The mother strained forward with her whole body in fresh anticipation of something dreadful.

The prosecutor stood to the right of the judges, his face turned to them, one elbow on the desk. Having taken a deep breath and made a little flourish with his right hand, he began to speak. The mother could not grasp his first words. His voice flowed on thick and smooth but uneven—sometimes fast, sometimes slow. For a while the words would come slow and monotonous, like painstaking stitches, then suddenly they would swarm up and circle like flies about a lump of sugar. But she found nothing sinister in them. They drifted through the room as cold as snow and as grey as ashes, filling it little by little with something as unpleasant as fine dry dust. This speech, so eloquent, so devoid of feeling, seemed not to reach Pavel and his comrades; at least it did not affect them in the least. They went on sitting there as unruffled as ever, talking quietly, sometimes smiling, sometimes frowning to hide their laughter.

"He's lying," whispered Sizov.

She was not sure of that. The prosecutor was accusing all of the prisoners without exception. After speaking of Pavel, he began to speak of Feodor, and when he finished with Feodor, he moved on to Bukin. He seemed to be packing them all neatly away in one bag. But she was not satisfied with the formal meaning of his words, which neither incensed nor intimidated her. She still expected something frightening, and searched for it beyond his words—in his face, his eyes, his voice, in his white hand with which he kept gesturing gracefully. And yet there *was* something frightening here. She knew there was, but she could not capture it and reduce it to a definition, despite the warnings of her heart.

She looked at the judges. They were simply bored by the speech. Nothing at all was expressed on their lifeless grey and yellow faces. The prosecutor's words spread a fog invisible to the eye, which thickened about the judges, enveloping them in a cloud of indifference and weary waiting. The senior judge sat stiffly erect, and from time to time the grey dots behind his spectacles melted into the colourless expanse of his face.

And as she looked on that cold indifference, that feelingless detachment, she could not help asking herself, "Can they really be sitting in judgment?"

The question made her heart contract, gradually squeezing out her fear and leaving only an acute sense of injury.

The prosecutor's speech ended unexpectedly. He finished off with a few last stitches, bowed to the judges and sat down, rubbing his hands. The Marshal of the Nobility nodded to him and rolled up his eyes; the Mayor stretched out his hand, while the Head of the Volost simply stared at his belly and smiled.

But apparently the judges were not pleased with his speech. They did not move.

"Now," said the old man, holding a paper to his face, "the court will hear the counsellor for the defence on behalf of Fedoseyev, Markov and Zagarov."

The lawyer whom the mother had seen at Nikolai's stood up. He had a broad, amiable face with little eyes which sparkled as though two sharp blades protruded from under his reddish eyebrows, cutting the air like scissors. He spoke loudly and clearly and unhurriedly, but the mother could not follow his speech.

"Understand what he said?" whispered Sizov in her ear. "Understand? He said the prisoners were off their chumps. Does not sound like my Feodor?"

She was too chagrined to answer. Her sense of injury increased until it became a great weight on her heart. Now it was clear to her that she had expected justice. She had expected to see a strict, honest weighing of her son against his accusers. She had expected that the judges would question him long and carefully as to what was going on within him; that they would turn keen eyes upon all his thoughts and actions. And when they saw the truth, they would justly proclaim in a loud voice:

"This man is right!"

But nothing of the sort happened. An unspeakable distance seemed to separate those on trial from their judges, and apparently the prisoners had no use for these judges. In her weariness the mother lost all interest in the trial, and no longer heard what was being said.

"Do you call this a trial?" she thought resentfully.

"Give it to them!" whispered Sizov approvingly.

A different lawyer was speaking now—a small man with a sharp, pale, mocking face. The judges kept interrupting him.

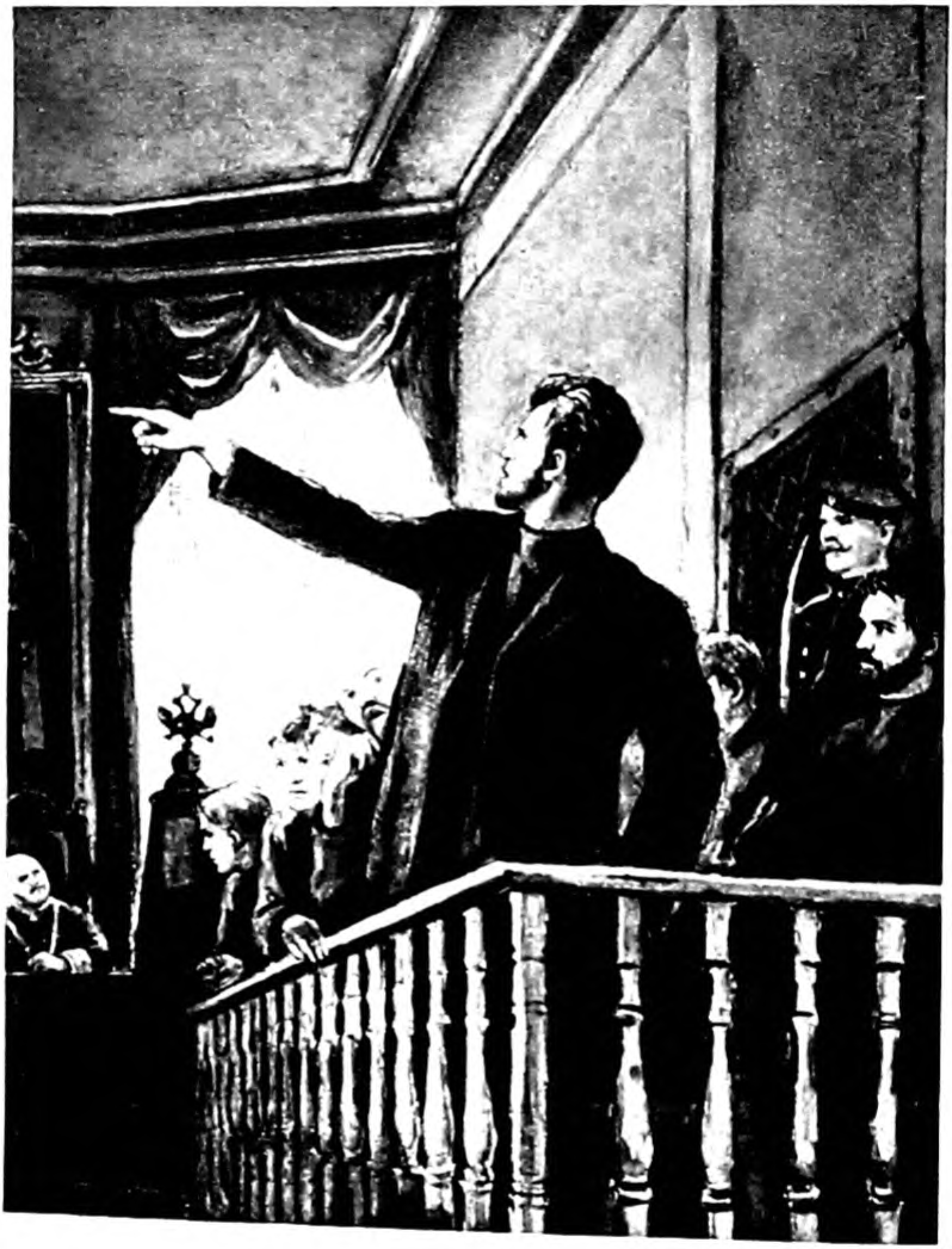
The prosecutor jumped up angrily and said something about the order of proceedings at which the old man made feeble remonstrance. The counsellor for the defence listened with his head lowered respectfully, then resumed his speech.

"Go to the bottom of it," said Sizov.

The audience grew excited, even aggressive, as the lawyer's sharp accusations chafed the tough skin of the judges, who seemed to huddle together, sullen and sulky, to withstand the sharp thrusts of his eloquence.

Now Pavel had risen, and suddenly the room grew utterly quiet. The mother strained forward. Pavel spoke very calmly.

"As a party member, I only recognize judgment passed by my party, and so I will not speak in my defence; but at the request of my comrades, who have also refused to defend themselves, I shall attempt to explain to you those things



you have not understood. The prosecutor has called our demonstration under the banner of Social-Democracy a revolt against the ruling power, and he has at all times looked upon us as people trying to overthrow the tsar. I wish to make it clear that we do not consider the autocracy the only chain binding our country; it is only the first chain from which it is our duty to free the people."

The silence became more profound as he spoke in his firm voice; the hall seemed to expand, and Pavel to be lifted up and placed in high relief.

The judges shifted ponderously and uneasily in their chairs. The Marshal of the Nobility whispered something to the judge with the apathetic face, who nodded and whispered into the old man's right ear, while the ailing judge whispered into his left. Torn between right and left, the old man said something out loud, but his voice was drowned out by the broad and even flow of Pavel's speech.

"We are Socialists. That means we are against private property, an institution which disintegrates society, sets people against one another, creates an irreconcilable hostility of interests, resorts to falsehood in the effort to conceal or justify this hostility, and corrupts all people with lies, hypocrisy and hatred. We hold that a society which looks upon the individual as nothing but a means of making others rich is inhuman and hostile to our interests. We cannot accept its false and hypocritical system of morality. We denounce the cynicism and cruelty of its attitude towards the individual. We want to fight and will fight against all the forms of physical and moral slavery enforced on the individual by such a society, against all means of crushing human beings in the interests of selfish greed. We are workers, people by whose labour all things are made, from children's toys to massive machines; yet we are people deprived of the right to defend our human dignity. Anyone is able to exploit us for his own personal ends. At present we want to achieve a degree of freedom which will eventually enable us to take all power into our own hands. Our slogans are simple enough: 'Down with private property!' 'All means of production in the hands of the people!' 'All power in the hands of the people!' 'No one exempt from work!' You can see from this that we are not mere rebels!"

Pavel gave a short laugh and slowly ran his fingers through his hair. The light of his blue eyes flared up brighter than ever.

"I must ask you to stick to the point," said the old man loudly and distinctly. He turned to look at Pavel, and the mother imagined that a greedy, malicious light flashed in his dull left eye. All the judges looked at her son, their eyes fastened on his face, sucking his strength, thirsting for his blood, that it might resuscitate their own exhausted bodies. But he stood there tall and straight, strong and brave, holding out his hand and saying:

"We are revolutionaries and will go on being revolutionaries as long as some people do nothing but give orders, and others do nothing but work. We are against the society whose interests you judges have been ordered to defend; we are its uncompromising enemies, and yours too, and no reconciliation between us is possible until we have won our fight. And we workers are sure to win! Your masters are not so strong as they think! That private property for whose accumulation and protection they sacrifice the millions of lives at their command, that very force which gives them power over us, gives rise to friction among them, destroying them physically and morally. The cost of defending private property is too high. As a matter of fact, all of you, our masters, are more like slaves than we are. You are enslaved spiritually; we—only physically. You are unable to shake off the yoke of habit and prejudice, a yoke which has killed you spiritually. But nothing keeps us from being free in spirit. The poisons you feed us are weaker than the antidotes which, against your own will, you pour into our minds. Our knowledge of the truth is growing all the time, and it is attracting the best people—all who are pure in spirit—even from your own circles. Just see—you already have no one who is able to defend the principles of your class; you have exhausted the arguments that could save you from the crushing pressure of historical justice; you are unable to create any new ideas; you are spiritually barren. Our ideas are growing, gaining strength, inspiring the masses and mobilizing them for the struggle for freedom. A knowledge of the great role to be played by the working class is welding all the workers of the world into one great force, and there is nothing with which you can oppose the rejuvenation they are bringing to the world except cruelty and mockery. But mockery is too obvious, and cruelty is an irritant. The hands which are laid on our throats today will be extended to us in comradely clasp tomorrow. Your energy is the mechanical energy of multiplying gold; it splits you into groups meant to gobble each other up. Our energy lies in the vital and ever-increasing consciousness of the solidarity of all working people. All that you do is criminal, for it turns people into slaves. Your lies and greed and wickedness have created a world of fiends and monsters to intimidate the people. It's up to us to free them from these monsters. You have torn man away from life and destroyed him; socialism will take the world you have destroyed and rebuild it into one great whole, and nothing you can do will stop it!"

Pavel paused and repeated in stronger, softer accents: "Nothing you can do will stop it!"

The judges whispered together and made strange grimaces without taking their covetous eyes off Pavel. The mother felt they were contaminating his strong body with their glances, which were full of envy of his health and strength and freshness. The prisoners listened to the speech of their comrade with rapt attention—their faces pale, their eyes glowing with happiness. The mother drank in her son's words, and they became imprinted on her mind in serried ranks. Several times the old man interrupted Pavel, trying to make something clear, and once he even gave a sad smile. Pavel would stop each time, only to continue with a calm firmness that forced people to listen to him, subjecting the will of the judges to his own will. But at last the old man cried out and stretched out his hand, and then Pavel's voice assumed a touch of sarcasm.

"I've almost finished. I don't want to offend you personally; on the contrary, as I sat here, an unwilling witness of this farce you call a trial, I almost sympathized with you. After all, you are human beings, and it is always insulting to see human beings, even those who are hostile to our cause, so shamefully debased in the service of brute force, so utterly deprived of their sense of human dignity. . . ."

He took his seat without looking at the judges, while the mother watched them with bated breath.

Andrei's face was beaming as he squeezed Pavel's hand. Samoilov, Mazin and the others leaned towards him and Pavel smiled, embarrassed by their admiration. He glanced toward his mother and nodded as if to say, "Are you satisfied?"

She replied with a happy sigh, and a warm wave of love swept over her face.

"Now the real trial's begun!" whispered Sizov. "He put it plain enough, didn't he?"

She nodded without answering, happy that her son had spoken so boldly—perhaps even happier that he had finished. But one question kept throbbing in her mind: "What will they do now?"

XXVI

Her son had said nothing that was new to her. She was familiar with all his thoughts, but here, before the court, she felt for the first time the strange attraction of his faith. She was amazed at Pavel's composure, and his speech was to her as a radiant star symbolizing faith in his cause and its ultimate victory. She expected the judges to enter into hot argument with him now, angrily contradicting him and advancing their own convictions. But Andrei got up, swayed, glanced at the judges from under his brows, and said:

"Honourable defenders. . . ."

"You are addressing judges, and not defenders!" said the ailing judge in a loud, angry voice. The mother detected something roguish in Andrei's face; his moustaches were quivering and she recognized a familiar feline glint in his eyes. He vigorously rubbed his head with his long, thin hand and gave a sigh.

"Is that so?" he said, shaking his head. "It strikes me you're no judges, but merely defenders."

"I must ask you to stick to the point!" observed the old man dryly.

"To the point? Very well then, suppose I make myself believe you are really judges, men of honour and independence. . . ."

"The court has no need of your recommendation!"

"Is that so? Well, I'll give it anyway. So let's say you're impartial people, unprejudiced, without any 'yours' and 'mine.' Two people are brought before you. One says: he robbed me and beat me to a pulp; the other says: I have a right to rob people and beat them to a pulp because I own a whip. . . ."

"Have you nothing to say that is to the point?" asked the old man, raising his voice. His hand was shaking, and the mother was glad to see how furious he was. But she disliked Andrei's behaviour—somehow it did not harmonize with the speech of her son. She wanted their arguments to be serious and dignified.

The *khokhol* looked silently at the old man before he went on.

"To the point?" he said soberly, wiping his brow. "Why should I speak to the point with you? My comrade has already told you all you should know for the present. Others will tell you the rest when the time comes."

The old man raised himself in his chair. "Sit down!" he shouted. "Next—Grigori Samoilov!"

The *khokhol* tightened his lips and sat down unhurriedly. Samoilov got up and stood beside him, shaking back his curly hair.

"The prosecutor called my comrades savages, enemies of civilization. . . ."

"Say nothing but what concerns your trial."

"This concerns it. There's nothing that shouldn't concern honest people. And please don't interrupt me. What do you call civilization—that's what I'd like to know?"

"We are not here to debate with you! No digressions!" said the old man, baring his lower teeth.

The behaviour of Andrei had brought about a change in the judges—had peeled something off, as it were. Their grey faces grew blotched, and cold green sparks glinted in their eyes. They had been annoyed by Pavel's speech, but the power of his words had forced them to respect him and keep up appearances. The *khokhol* had ripped off appearances and exposed what was underneath. They whispered together, grimacing and gesturing too energetically for them.

"You train people to be spies, you corrupt women and girls, you turn men into thieves and murderers, you poison them with vodka, international wars, lies, debauchery and savagery—there's your civilization for you! We are enemies of such a civilization!"

"I must ask you . . ." shouted the old man. But Samoilov, red-faced, bright-eyed, shouted back:

"We respect and value that other civilization advocated by the people you throw in jail to rot away or go insane—"

"Sit down! Next—Feodor Mazin!"

Little Feodor sprang to his feet as straight and slim as a stiletto.

"I swear to God I'll go right on working," he gasped, growing so pale that only his eyes were seen. "I know you've already passed sentence on me, but I swear to God I'll run away no matter where you send me and go on working always, all my life." He raised one hand as if taking oath. "I swear it."

Sizov gave a loud grunt and shifted in his seat. The audience, lifted on a mounting wave of excitement, began to murmur ominously. A woman sobbed and someone had a spell of coughing. The gendarmes looked at the prisoners in dull astonishment and at the public in anger. The judges rocked back and forth.

"Next—Ivan Gusev!" cried the old man.

"I don't want to say anything."

"Next—Vasili Gusev!"

"Neither do I!"

"Feodor Bukin!"

The whitish, colour-drained fellow rose heavily.

"You should be ashamed of yourselves," he began, shaking his head. "I take hard to learning, but even I can see what's fair." He raised an arm above his head and was silent, half closing his eyes as though looking at something far away.

"What's that?" cried the old man, surprised and annoyed, as he tilted back his chair.

"To hell with you!"

Bukin sullenly sat down. There was something of enormous importance in his words, something naive and sadly reproachful. Everyone sensed this, and even the judges pricked up their ears, as though expecting an echo which would be more lucid than what Bukin had said. A frozen silence reigned in the hall, broken only by vague suggestions of weeping. At last the prosecutor shrugged his shoulders and gave a short laugh, the Marshal of the Nobility coughed and people began to whisper again.

"Will the judges speak?" whispered the mother to Sizov.

"Everything's over except the sentence."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

She could not believe it.

Samoilov's mother squirmed uneasily on the bench, pushing Pelagea with shoulder and elbow.

"What's that? It can't be over, can it?" she asked her husband.

"It can, as you will soon see."

"What'll they give our Grisha?"

"Stop talking."

Everyone was conscious of some violation, some dislocation, something broken. People blinked uncomprehendingly, as though they were watching the bright combustion of a mass whose outlines were indefinable, whose significance was obscure, but whose force was irresistible. Failing to understand the great thing that had suddenly been revealed to them, they vented their feelings on trifles that they did understand.

"Listen, why didn't they let them talk?" asked the elder Bukin in a loud whisper. "They let the prosecutor say as much and whatever he liked."

An official stood near the benches and waved his hand above the people.

"Quiet, quiet," he admonished.

Samoilov leaned behind his wife's back and sputtered broken phrases.

"All right, let's say they're guilty. But give them a chance to explain! Who are they against? That's what I want to know! I too have my own interests at heart. . . ."

"Hush!" warned the official, shaking his finger at Samoilov.

Sizov shook his head mournfully.

The mother kept her eyes on the judges and noticed that their excitement increased as they talked together. The cold, slimy sound of their voices touched her face, making her cheeks quiver and leaving an ugly, unwholesome taste in her mouth. For some reason she felt they were talking about the bodies of her son and his comrades, about their young limbs and muscles, so charged with hot blood and vitality. Such bodies roused in them the mean envy of beggars, the sticky greed of the sick and exhausted. They smacked their lips and coveted these bodies, that could work and grow rich, create and know pleasure. Now these bodies were being withdrawn from the daily round; they were being rejected, and this meant they could no longer be possessed, exploited, or consumed. And for that reason the young men roused in the old judges the gnawing, vengeful fury of worn-out beasts who see fresh food before them and lack the strength to seize it. Beasts who are no longer capable of taking their fill of other creatures' strength, but only growl and whine on seeing a means of satiety escaping them.

Such strange, crude thoughts took more distinct shape in her mind as she studied the judges more attentively. They seemed to make no effort to hide the greed and impotent rage of famished creatures who knew what it meant to feast. For her, a woman and a mother, to whom the body of her son was dearer than what is called the soul, it was dreadful to watch their dull eyes crawl over his face, touch his breast, his shoulders, his arms, rub against his vital flesh as though the friction would warm the blood flowing in their own sclerosed veins and expended muscles. Now they were somewhat revived by the lust and envy induced by a contemplation of these young men whom they were destined to condemn, thus depriving themselves of their bodies forever. She imagined that Pavel was aware of this moist, unpleasant touch and looked at her with a shudder.

He looked at her calmly and tenderly, a shade of weariness in his glance. From time to time he nodded to her and smiled.

"Soon—freedom!" were the words she read in this smile, which was like a caress.

At that moment the judges got up. The mother did too.

"There they go," said Sizov.

"For the sentence?" she asked.

"Yes."

The tension she had been under suddenly broke and she felt faint from exhaustion. Her brows quivered and beads of perspiration broke out on her forehead. A weight of hurt and disappointment struck at her heart and was quickly transformed into contempt for the court and judges. Aware of an aching head, she pressed her hand to her forehead and looked up: the relatives of the prisoners had gone over to the bars and the courtroom was filled with the hum of conversation. She too went to Pavel, took his hand and wept, racked by pain and joy, entangled in a mesh of conflicting emotions. Pavel spoke to her gently, and the *khokhol* laughed and joked.

All the women cried, but more from habit than grief. There was no stunning grief, falling unseen and unexpected; there was only the sad necessity of parting with their children, but even this was alleviated by the impressions of the day. Fathers and mothers looked upon their sons with mixed feelings, in which mistrust of youth and the usual sense of their own superiority were strangely blended with something akin to respect. Sad thoughts as to how they should now go on living were eclipsed by the wonder inspired by these young people who spoke so boldly and fearlessly about the possibility of another, better way of life. Feelings were suppressed because of the inability to express them; words were spent lavishly, but on such simple things as clothes and laundry and health.

The elder Bukin waved his hand as he talked to his younger brother.

"Justice is all that matters. Nothing else!"

"Take care of the starling," answered the younger one.

"I will."

Sizov took his nephew by the arm.

"Well, Feodor, you're leaving us," he said.

Feodor leaned down and whispered something in his ear, smiling happily. And the guard smiled, but quickly checked the smile and cleared his throat.

The mother spoke to her son just as the other women did—about clothes and his health—but she wanted to ask a thousand questions about Sasha and herself and him. Over and above all this soared a boundless love for her son, and a desire to please him, to be dear to him. The dread of what was coming faded away, leaving only an unpleasant shudder at the memory of the judges and the dark impressions of the trial. Something radiantly joyful had been born within her, she did not fully understand what it was, and accepted it diffidently. Seeing the *khokhol* talking to the people, and knowing that he needed affection more than Pavel did, she turned to him.

"I didn't think much of this trial of yours!" she said.

"Why not, *nenko?*" he asked with a grateful smile. "The mill's old, but it goes on grinding. . . ."

"It didn't frighten anybody, but it didn't tell them anything either. Who's right and who's wrong?" she said haltingly.

"Cho! So that's what you wanted!" exclaimed Andrei. "You think they're interested in getting at the truth?"

"I thought it would be dreadful," she said, taking a deep breath and smiling.

"Order in the court!"

The people scurried back to their places.

The senior judge leaned on the table with one hand and held a paper in front of his face with the other. He began to read in a thin, sibilant voice.

"He's reading the sentence," said Sizov, straining forward.

The room grew quiet. Everyone stood up with eyes glued on the old man. Small, thin, and straight, he looked like a stick held in some invisible hand. The other judges stood up too; the Head of the Volost, his head on one side and his eyes fixed on the ceiling; the Mayor, his hands crossed on his breast; the Marshal of the Nobility stroking his beard;

the sickly judge, his bloated colleague and the prosecutor, all staring at the prisoners. Behind the judges, the tsar gazed down from his portrait, resplendent in a red uniform, a look of indifference on his white face, over which a fly was now crawling.

"Exile!" said Sizov with a sigh of relief. "Well, thank God it's over. I was afraid it would be hard labour. This is better, mother."

"I knew this is what it would be," she said in a tired voice.

"Well, now it's certain. There was no telling what they might do."

He turned to the prisoners who were already being led out.

"Good-bye, Feodor!" he cried. "And all the rest of you! God bless you!"

The mother nodded silently to her son and the others. She felt like crying, but was ashamed to.

XXVII

She was surprised on leaving the courtroom to see that it was already night. Lights were burning on the street corners and stars gleamed in the sky. Groups of people had gathered near the courthouse, the snow crunched in the cold air, young voices could be heard. A man in a grey cowl glanced into Sizov's face.

"What was the sentence?" he asked quickly.

"Exile."

"For all?"

"Yes."

"Thanks."

The man walked away.

"See?" said Sizov. "They're interested."

Suddenly they were surrounded by a dozen young girls and boys whose loud ejaculations attracted other people to the little crowd. The mother and Sizov stopped. They were asked what the sentence was, how the prisoners had conducted themselves, who had made speeches and what they had said; and all the questions were asked with such genuine concern that the mother was only too glad to answer them.

"Gentlemen! This is the mother of Pavel Vlassov," said someone, and instantly there was silence.

"Allow me to shake your hand!"

Somebody's strong hand gripped the mother's fingers and somebody's agitated voice said, "Your son is an example of courage for all of us."

"Long live the Russian workers!" came a loud cry.

The cries increased and multiplied, breaking out now here, now there. People came running from all sides, crowding about Sizov and the mother. Policemen's whistles were blown, but they could not drown out the cries. Sizov laughed. To the mother this seemed a happy dream. She smiled and bowed and pressed people's hands, while tears of joy filled her eyes. Her legs ached with weariness, but her overflowing heart reflected impressions like the bright surface of a lake.

Someone close to her began to speak in a clear, nervous voice.

"Comrades, today the monster devouring the Russian people has closed its greedy jaws on. . . ."

"We had better be going, mother," said Sizov.

At that moment Sasha came up and, taking the mother by the arm, led her to the other side of the street.

"Come away before they start a fight or make some arrests," she said. "Exile? To Siberia?"

"Yes."

"How did he speak? But I know—he was the strongest of all, and the simplest. And of course the sternest. He has a tender, sensitive nature, but he's afraid to show it."

The words of her love, whispered with such ardour, calmed the mother and gave her new strength.

"When will you go out to join him?" she asked Sasha, pressing her arm affectionately.

"As soon as I find someone who can take over my work," replied the girl as she gazed confidently before her. "You see I'm expecting a sentence too. And I suppose it will be exile to Siberia too. If it is, I'll ask them to send me wherever he is."

"In that case, take him my regards," came the voice of Sizov. "Just say, 'from Sizov.' He knows me. Feodor Mazin's uncle."

Sasha turned and held out her hand.

"I know Feodor. My name is Sasha."

"And your patronymic?"

She looked at him steadily.

"I have no father," she said.

"Dead?"

"No, not dead." Something stubborn and insistent crept into the girl's voice and was reflected in her face. "He's a landlord and now the Rural Administrator—he robs the peasants."

"Hm-m," said Sizov uneasily. In the silence that followed he walked on beside the girl and kept casting sidelong glances at her.

"Well, good-bye, mother," he said at last. "I turn left here. Good-bye, my girl. Rather hard on that father of yours, aren't you? Of course, that's your business. . . ."

"If your son was no good, if he harmed the people and you despised him, wouldn't you denounce him?" cried Sasha impassionedly.

"Well—maybe I would," answered the old man after a moment.

"You would if justice was dearer to you than your son, and it's dearer to me than my father. . . ."

Sizov smiled and shook his head.

"Well, you're a tough one!" he said with a sigh. "If you've the strength to keep it up, you'll get the best of the old folks yet! A lot of steam you've got! Well, good-bye and best wishes! But why not be a little easier on people, eh? Good-bye, Nilovna! When you see Pavel, tell him I heard his speech. Didn't understand all of it, some of it was a bit hard to digest, but on the whole it was good."

He raised his cap and slowly turned the corner.

"He seems a nice man," said Sasha, smiling as she followed him with her large eyes.

The mother found that today the girl's face was more kind and gentle than usual.

When they got home, they sat down beside each other on the couch and talked about Sasha's anticipated trip to Pavel. The silence was restful. Sasha raised her heavy brows and looked into the distance with wide, dreamy eyes, and her pale face wore an expression of calm contemplation.

"Then when your children are born I'll come and play nursemaid. And our life there won't be any worse than here. It won't be hard for Pavel to find work—he can do anything with his hands. . . ."

Sasha glanced at the mother inquiringly.

"Don't you intend to go with him now?" she asked.

"What does he want with me?" answered the mother with a sigh. "I'd only be in the way in case he wanted to escape. He wouldn't want me to go."

Sasha nodded.

"You're right. He wouldn't."

"And then I have my own work to do here," added the mother with a shade of pride.

"Yes," answered Sasha. "And that's important."

Suddenly she made a movement as if throwing off something, and began to speak quietly and simply.

"He won't go on living there. Of course he'll run away."

"And what about you? And the child, if there is one?"

"We'll see when the time comes. He mustn't think about me, and I'll never let myself stand in his way. It will be hard for me to part with him, but I can do it. I will never stand in his way!"

The mother realized that Sasha was quite capable of doing what she said, and she felt sorry for the girl.

"It will be hard for you, my dear," she said, embracing her.

Sasha smiled softly and nestled closer to the mother.

At that moment Nikolai came in, tired and weary.

"You better get out while you have the chance, Sasha," he said as he took off his coat. "Two spies have been following me since morning—so openly that it smells of arrest. My instinct never fails me. Something has happened. By the way, here's Pavel's speech—we've decided to print it. Take it to Ludmilla and ask her to work as fast as possible. Pavel made a fine speech, Nilovna! Watch out for spies, Sasha."

He rubbed his frozen hands as he spoke, then went over to his desk and began taking papers out of the drawers. Some of them he tore up, others he put aside. He looked worn and worried.

"It hasn't been so long since I cleaned out these drawers; the devil only knows where all this new stuff has come from! I think it would be better if you didn't spend the night at home, Nilovna. What do you think? Rather a bore to attend the show. And besides they might take you too. You'll be needed to travel about, distributing Pavel's speech. . . ."

"Whatever would they want with me?"

Nikolai gave a wave of his hand.

"I have a nose for such things," he said firmly. "And you can be of great help to Ludmilla. Don't take any chances."

The mother was pleased with the idea of helping print her son's speech.

"If that's how it is, I'll go," she said, adding to her own surprise, "I'm not afraid of anything any more thank the Lord!"

"Good!" exclaimed Nikolai without looking up. "But you had better tell me where my bag and linen is. With those grasping ways of yours, you've taken over so completely that I can't even find my own belongings!"

Sasha was burning papers in the stove and mixing the ashes with the coals.

"Time to leave, Sasha," said Nikolai, holding out his hand. "Good-bye. Don't forget to send me any interesting books that happen to turn up. Good-bye, dear comrade. Be careful."

"Are you expecting a long term?" asked Sasha.

"Who knows? Probably. They have things against me. Hadn't you better go along with her, Nilovna? It's harder to follow two people at once."

"All right," answered the mother. "I'll put on my coat and hat."

She studied Nikolai carefully, but he was the same except for a certain anxiety clouding the usual kind and gentle expression of his face. There were no nervous movements, no signs of agitation in this man who had become dearer to her than others. He had always shown equal attention to everyone, had always been kind and even-tempered and serenely alone. And now he remained for everyone what he had always been—a man living a secret inner life which was somewhere up ahead of other lives. She knew that he found in her a kindred spirit, and she loved him with a love that was not quite sure of itself. Now the pity she felt for him was unbearable, but she dared not show it lest Nikolai become upset and embarrassed, in which case he would appear slightly ridiculous, and she did not want him to look ridiculous.

She entered the room again and found Nikolai holding Sasha's hand.

"Splendid! I'm sure that will be just the thing for him and for you," he was saying. "A little personal happiness does nobody any harm. Are you ready, Nilovna?"

He came up to her, smiling and pushing up his glasses.

"Well, good-bye—for three or four months—no more than six, I hope. Six months! That's a big piece of life! Take care of yourself, will you? Here, let me kiss you."

Thin and delicate, he put strong arms about her and looked into her eyes.

"I seem to have fallen in love with you," he laughed. "Hugging you this way. . . ."

She kissed his brow and cheeks without speaking, but her arms were trembling. She took them away so that he should not notice it.

"Be particularly careful tomorrow. In the morning send a little boy over—Ludmilla knows such a boy—to reconnoitre. Well, good-bye, comrades. Everything is just as it should be."

When they were outside, Sasha said quietly, "If he ever has to go to his death, he'll do it just as simply, hurrying a little. And when death looks him in the face, he'll push up his glasses and say 'Splendid!' before he dies."

"I've come to love him dearly," said the mother softly.

"He astonishes me, but I don't love him. I respect him tremendously. He's kind and even tender at times, but there's something dry about him—he isn't human enough. . . .

But it seems we're being shadowed. We'd better part. Don't go to Ludmilla's if you feel you're being followed."

"I won't," said the mother.

"Be sure not to," Sasha insisted. "Come to my place instead. Good-bye for the present."

She turned quickly and retraced her steps.

XXVIII

A few minutes later the mother was sitting warming herself at the stove in Ludmilla's little room. Ludmilla, in a black dress with a leather belt, was slowly pacing the floor, filling the room with the rustle of her skirts and the sound of her imperious voice.

The fire crackled and roared in the stove, sucking in the air, while the woman's voice flowed on evenly.

"People are more stupid than wicked. They can only see what is in front of their eyes and can be grasped at once. But everything close at hand is cheap—only things far away are dear. When you get right down to it, everyone would be happier and better off if life were different—if it were easier and people were more reasonable. But it will take a long time to achieve this."

Suddenly she halted in front of the mother.

"I don't see people very often, and when I do, I begin to harangue," she said apologetically. "You must think I'm crazy."

"Why?" said the mother. She tried to discover where this woman printed their pamphlets, but she couldn't. In this room with its three windows facing the street stood a couch and a bookcase, a table, chairs, and a bed. In one corner was a washstand, in another the stove. Photographs hung on the wall. Everything was fresh and clean and in good re-pair, and over it all the austere figure of the owner threw a cold shadow. The mother felt that something was hidden, but could not guess where. She looked at the doors. She had entered through one which led into a little hall; there was another one, high and narrow, next to the stove.

"I have come on business," she said self-consciously, noticing that Ludmilla was eyeing her closely.

"I know. People don't come to see me otherwise."

The mother noticed something strange in Ludmilla's tone. She looked into her face; there was the shadow of a smile on her thin lips, and her eyes were shining dully from behind her glasses. The mother looked away and held out Pavel's speech.

"Here. They would like you to print it as quickly as possible."

Then she said that Nikolai was expecting to be arrested.

Ludmilla silently slipped the paper into her belt and sat down. The fire glowed ruddily on her glasses and its warm light played over her immobile face.

"When they come for me I will shoot them," she said quietly and resolutely when the mother finished speaking. "I have a right to defend myself from violence and I'm obliged to put up a fight if that's what I challenge others to do."

The glow of the fire slipped off her face, leaving it as stern and haughty as ever.

"This is no way to live," thought the mother suddenly, in a wave of pity.

Ludmilla began to read Pavel's speech half-heartedly, but she grew more interested as she went on, and at last turned over the pages one after another with eager impatience. When she finished she got up, squared her shoulders and came over to the mother.

"A very good speech," she said.

She stood musing for a moment with lowered head.

"I didn't want to speak to you about your son—I have never met him and I don't like to touch on painful subjects. I know what it means to have someone dear to you sent into exile. But—I was wondering—are you glad you have such a son?"

"Very," said the mother.

"And not—afraid?"

"Not any more," answered the mother with a serene smile.

Ludmilla patted down her plain hair with one hand and turned to the window. A shadow flitted over her face—perhaps the shadow of a suppressed smile.

"I'll set the type in no time. Lie down. You've had a hard day and must be tired. Lie here on the bed. I won't go to bed and may even wake you up in the night to help me. Turn out the lamp when you're ready to go to sleep."

She threw two logs into the stove and went out through the narrow door, closing it tightly behind her. The mother watched her go and then began to undress, thinking about her.

"She's grieving over something. . . ."

The mother was exhausted, but she felt strangely peaceful and everything seemed to shine with a soft, gentle light which quietly flooded her soul. She had known this peace before. It always came to her after any great emotional stress. There had been a time when it frightened her, but now it merely caused her spirit to expand, reinforcing it with great, strong feeling. She put out the lamp and climbed into the cold bed, settling herself comfortably under the blanket and soon falling into a deep sleep.

When she opened her eyes the room was filled with the cold white light of a clear winter's day. Ludmilla looked up from the couch where she was lying with a book in her hands, and smiled in an unwonted way.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the mother in embarrassment. "What a creature I am! Is it very late?"

"Good morning!" replied Ludmilla. "Almost ten. Get up and we'll have tea."

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"I was going to, but when I came over you were smiling so sweetly in your sleep I hadn't the heart."

She got up off the couch with a lithe movement, went over to the bed and bent down. In the younger woman's lustreless eyes the mother caught an expression that she knew and loved.

"It seemed a pity to disturb you. Perhaps you were having a happy dream."

"I wasn't."

"It doesn't matter. I liked your smile. It was so calm and good and . . . all encompassing."

Ludmilla laughed, and the laugh was soft and velvety.

"It made me start thinking about you. Is your life hard?"

The mother's eyebrows quivered as she wondered whether it was or not.

"It must be," exclaimed Ludmilla.

"I'm not sure," said the mother slowly. "Sometimes it seems hard. But it's so full—and everything in it is so important and surprising, and one thing follows the other so quickly. . . ."

As often happened now, she felt a sudden upsurge of excitement; thoughts and images teemed in her mind, and she sat up in bed and patiently began to clothe them in words.

"It goes on and on—all towards one end. . . . But sometimes it *is* hard. People suffer and are beaten—cruelly beaten—and not allowed to be happy. That's very hard!"

Ludmilla threw back her head and gazed at her fondly.

"But you aren't talking about yourself."

The mother got out of bed and began dressing.

"How can you think of yourself apart from others when you love this one, and that one, and are afraid for all of them and pity all of them—all that great crowd of people in your heart? . . . How can you draw apart from them?"

She stood for a moment in the middle of the room, only partly dressed, lost in thought. She felt it was no longer that same woman who had been so full of fears and alarms for her son, who had been so intent on saving his body. That woman no longer existed. She had withdrawn, gone somewhere far away, or perhaps been consumed by the fire of her emotion, and this had purged and refined her spirit and charged it with new strength. She searched her heart, listening to its beat, fearing to revive old dreads.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Ludmilla, going over to her.

"I don't know," answered the mother.

Silently they looked at each other and smiled, then Ludmilla went out of the room, saying, "I wonder what's happening to my samovar."

The mother looked out of the window. It was a cold sunny day. Her heart was sunny too, and warm as well. She wanted to talk about everything—to talk long and joyously, with a vague feeling of gratitude to someone for all that had entered her soul and was glowing there with the lovely light preceding sunset. A desire to pray, which she had not experienced for a long time now returned. A young face flashed through her mind and she heard a clear voice call out, "That's the mother of Pavel Vlassov!" She saw the moist, glowing eyes of Sasha, the dark figure of Rybin, the strong bronze face of her son, the shy, winking glance of Nikolai, and suddenly all of this merged into one deep sigh, blended into a transparent, rainbow-hued cloud which enveloped all her thoughts and brought a sense of peace.

"Nikolai was right," said Ludmilla as she came back into the room. "They have arrested him. I sent the boy round as you advised. He said there were policemen in the garden and he saw a policeman hiding behind the gate. And there are spies everywhere. The boy knows them."

"The poor man!" said the mother, shaking her head.

She sighed, but without grief, and this secretly amazed her.

"He has been teaching the workers in town lately. I suppose it was time he got caught," said Ludmilla matter-of-factly, but with a frown on her face. "His comrades told him to go away, but he wouldn't listen to them. I'm afraid people should be forced to leave in such cases, and not persuaded."

At that moment a black-haired, red-cheeked boy with fine blue eyes and an aquiline nose appeared in the doorway.

"Shall I bring in the samovar?" he asked.

"If you please, Sergei." She turned to the mother. "He's my ward."

The mother found Ludmilla different today; she was simpler and more congenial. There was much beauty and strength in the graceful movements of her body, and this softened the effect of her pale, stern face. The night's work had darkened the circles under her eyes, and one felt a tension, a taut string in her soul.

The boy brought in the samovar.

"Let me introduce you, Sergei. This is Pelagea Nilovna, mother of one of the workers who were sentenced yesterday."

Sergei bowed without speaking, shook the mother's hand, went out of the room, returned with a loaf of bread, and took his place at the table. As she poured the tea, Ludmilla tried to convince the mother not to go home until they found out whom the police were waiting for.

"Perhaps it's for you. They will probably call you up to be questioned."

"Let them," said the mother. "And let them arrest me if they want to—no great harm done. If only we distribute Pavel's speech first!"

"The type is set. Tomorrow we'll have enough copies for the town and the workers' settlement. Do you know Natasha?"

"Yes indeed."

"Take them to her."

The boy was reading the paper and seemed not to hear their talk, but now and again he would glance into the mother's face; she liked his bright eyes and would smile at him. Ludmilla spoke of Nikolai without grief, and the mother found this only natural. Time passed quickly; it was almost noon when they finished their breakfast.

"How late it is!" exclaimed Ludmilla.

At that moment someone gave a hurried knock at the door. The boy got up and looked at Ludmilla expectantly.

"Open the door, Sergei. Who could it be?"

Unperturbed, she put her hand into the pocket of her skirt and said to the mother, "If it's the gendarmes, you stand over there in the corner, Pelagea Nilovna, and you, Sergei—"

"I know," said the boy as he went out.

The mother smiled. These preparations no longer distressed her—she had no premonition of calamity.

But their visitor was only the little doctor.

"First of all," he said quickly, "Nikolai has been arrested. Aha! So this is where you are, Nilovna! Weren't you home when he was taken?"

"He sent me here."

"Hm. I'm afraid that won't help. And secondly, last night some young people mimeographed about five hundred copies of the speech. I saw them—not badly done—clear and distinct. They want to distribute them through the town tonight, but I'm against it. I think it would be better to distribute the printed copies in town and save those for some other place."

"I'll take them to Natasha," said the mother eagerly. "Give them to me."

She was desperately anxious to spread her Pavel's speech as quickly as possible, to scatter her son's words over the whole earth, and she fastened her eyes pleadingly on the doctor's face as she waited for his answer.

"The devil only knows whether you ought to do this now," he said uncertainly, taking out his watch. "It's twenty minutes to twelve now. There's a train at five minutes past two that would get you there at five fifteen. That's evening, but not late enough. But that's not the important thing. . . ."

"No, it's not," said Ludmilla with a frown.

"What is the important thing?" asked the mother, moving towards him. "Only that the job be well done. . . ."

Ludmilla gave her a searching glance.

"It's dangerous for you to do it," she said, passing a hand over her forehead.

"Why?" asked the mother with warm insistence.

"This is why," answered the doctor in quick, broken tones. "You left the house just an hour before Nikolai's arrest. You went to the factory where you are known as Nikolai's aunt. Shortly afterwards forbidden leaflets were found at the factory. All of that forms a nice little noose round your neck."

"No one will notice me," said the mother eagerly. "And if they arrest me when I come back and ask me where I was. . . ."

She hesitated for a second.

"I know what I'll say," she cried. "I'll go straight from there to the settlement. I have a friend there—Sizov—I'll say I went to his house after the trial—so that we could comfort each other. His nephew was sentenced too. He'll stand by me."

Sure that they would comply with her wish, and anxious to hurry the matter, she kept insisting. At last they gave in.

"All right, take them," said the doctor reluctantly.

Ludmilla said nothing, she just walked back and forth lost in thought. Her face looked thin and haggard, and the taut muscles of her neck showed the effort it required to keep her head from drooping on her chest. The mother saw this.

"You're worrying about me," she smiled, "but you don't worry about yourselves at all."

"Oh yes we do," said the doctor. "We're obliged to. And we're very harsh with those we see wasting their strength to no good purpose. Well then—you'll get the copies of the speech at the station."

He explained to her how this would be done.

"Here's wishing you luck!" he said when he finished.

But he seemed displeased with something when he went out. Ludmilla came up to the mother.

"I understand you," she said with a quiet laugh.

She took the mother's arm and began walking up and down again.

"I too have a son. He's thirteen years old, but he lives with his father. My husband is an assistant prosecutor. And the boy is with him. What will become of him? I often think about that. . . ." Her voice broke. "He is being brought up by a conscious enemy of the people I love and consider the finest people on earth. My son may grow up to be my own enemy. I cannot keep him with me—I live under an assumed name. I haven't seen him for eight years—eight years! What a long time!"

She stopped at the window and looked out at the pale, empty sky.

"If he lived with me I would be stronger. I wouldn't have this constant ache in my heart. . . . If he were dead—it would be easier for me. . . ."

"You poor dear!" breathed the mother, her heart torn by compassion.

"How lucky you are!" murmured Ludmilla with a bitter smile. "It's a wonderful thing for mother and son to stand side by side—and a very rare thing."

"Yes, it is wonderful," said Pelagea to her own surprise; then, lowering her voice as though confiding a secret: "And all of us—you, Nikolai Ivanovich and everyone else who follows the truth—all of us are standing side by side! Suddenly all of us have become kindred and I understand all of you. I can't always understand what you say, but I understand everything else."

"Yes, that is how it is," murmured Ludmilla. "That is how it is. . . ."

The mother put her hand on Ludmilla's breast and went on speaking almost in a whisper, as though she were seeing in her mind's eye the things she said.

"Our children have gone forth into the world—that is how I see it—into the whole world, coming from every corner of it and moving towards a single goal. The purest in heart, the finest in mind are moving against evil and trampling falsehood under strong feet. They're young and healthy, and all their strength is being spent in achieving one thing—justice! They have gone forth to do away with human sorrow, to wipe misfortune off the face of the earth, to conquer ugliness—and conquer it they will! To light a new sun, as one of them has said—and light it they will! To unite the broken-hearted—and unite them they will!"

She recalled the words of forgotten prayers, which uprose like sparks in her heart, kindling a new faith.

"Our children are treading the path of truth and reason, bringing love to the hearts of men, showing them a new heaven and lighting up the earth with a new fire—the unquenchable fire of the spirit. From its flames a new life is springing, born of our children's love for all mankind. Who can extinguish this love? Who? What force can destroy it? What force oppose it? The earth has given it birth, and life itself longs for its victory. Life itself!"

Worn out by the strength of her emotion, she walked away and sat down, breathing heavily. Ludmilla, too, walked away, silently, cautiously, as if fearing to violate something. Lithely she moved about the room, the deep gaze of her lustreless eyes fixed in front of her. She seemed to have grown taller, straighter, and more slender. Her thin austere face showed deep concentration, and her lips were nervously compressed. The silence in the room soon composed the mother.

"Perhaps I've said something I shouldn't?" she asked apologetically, noticing Ludmilla's perturbation.

Ludmilla turned and looked at her almost in fright. Then she spoke quickly, holding out her hand as if to say something.

"No, no. That is how it is. But we won't speak about it any more. Let it remain just as you have put it." Her voice was calmer as she added, "You must leave soon—you have a long way to go."

"If you only knew how glad I am! Taking to others the words of my son, the words of my own flesh and blood! It's like giving of my own soul!"

She smiled, but her smile was only vaguely reflected in the face of Ludmilla. The mother felt that her joy was being cooled by the younger woman's restraint, and suddenly she was filled with a fierce desire to pour her own fire into that stern soul—to make the other woman respond to the urgings of a heart bursting with joy. She took Ludmilla's hands and pressed them tightly as she said:

"Dear heart! How good it is to know there is a light pointing the way to all people, and that the time will come when all will see it and follow it with their whole hearts!"

A tremor passed over the mother's large, kindly face; her eyes glowed, and her brows quivered above them as if giving wing to their radiance. Her mind reeled with the great thoughts into which she poured her whole being, everything she had ever known and suffered. She concentrated the essence of these thoughts into the hard bright crystals of words, which grew and multiplied in her autumnal heart, lighted by the creative power of spring sun, burning and glowing there with increasing brightness.

"It is as if a new God had been born to man! Everything for all—all for everyone! That is how I see it. In very truth we are all comrades, all kindred spirits, all children of one mother, who is truth!"

Once more she was caught up in a wave of emotion. She stopped, took a deep breath, and flung wide her arms. "And when I say to myself the word 'Comrades,' I can hear them going forth in my heart!"

She had done what she wanted to do: Ludmilla's face flushed, her lips trembled, and large round tears stole down her cheeks.

The mother enfolded her in her arms, smiling softly and taking a tender joy in her heart's victory.

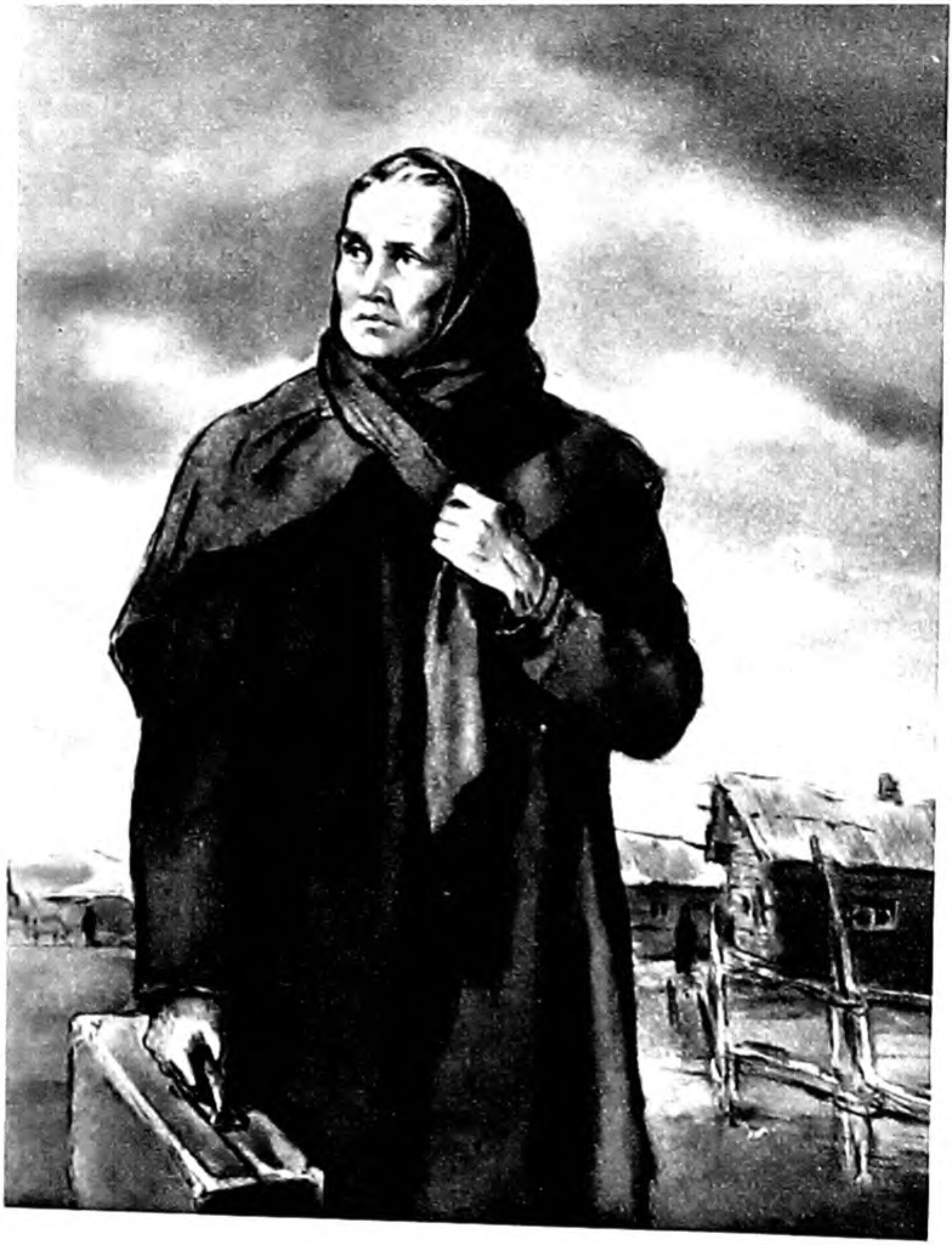
As they parted, Ludmilla glanced into the mother's face and said softly, "Do you know how good it is to be with you?"

XXIX

As soon as she stepped outside, the cold air seized her harshly, stung her nose, took her breath away. She stopped and looked about her. On the corner stood a droshky driver in a shaggy cap; further on a man was walking down the street all bent over, his head drawn between his shoulders, while in front of him ran a soldier, rubbing his ears.

"Must have sent the soldier to a shop," she thought, and went on her way, pleased to hear the snow crunch loudly under her feet. She reached the station before train time, but the dirty, sooty, third-class waiting room was crowded with people. The cold had driven track workers inside, as well as droshky drivers and many homeless, ill-clad folk. There were passengers as well, including some peasants, a fat merchant in a racoon coat, a priest and his pock-marked daughter, five or six soldiers, and some fidgety tradesmen. The people smoked and talked, drank tea and vodka. Someone at the refreshment bar burst into a peal of laughter; smoke billowed over everything. The door squeaked when it was opened, and the windowpanes shook and clattered when it was banged shut. The room reeked with the smell of tobacco and salt fish.

The mother took a conspicuous seat near the entrance and waited. Whenever the door was opened she felt a rush of cold air; she found this pleasant, and drank in deep breaths every time. Most of the people were carrying bundles, and would get stuck with them in the doorway, cursing and throwing them on the floor or the benches, grunting as they knocked the hoarfrost off their sleeves and collars, their beards and moustaches.



A young man with a tan suitcase in his hand came through the door, glanced quickly about, and went straight to the mother.

"Going to Moscow?" he asked.

"Yes, to Tanya," she replied.

"Here."

He put the suitcase on the bench beside her, lighted a cigarette, tipped his hat, and went out through the other door. The mother patted the cold leather of the suitcase, put her elbow on it and began to examine the people about her with an air of satisfaction. A minute later she got up and took another seat, nearer to the exit. She walked with her head held high, glancing at the faces she passed, easily carrying the suitcase, which was not very heavy.

A young man in a short coat with turned-up collar ran into her. Silently he stepped aside and lifted his hand to his hat. It struck her that there was something familiar about him. She glanced back and saw one pale eye staring at her over his collar. His fixed gaze was like a knife thrust; the arm with which she was holding the suitcase jerked convulsively, and suddenly her burden grew heavy.

"I've seen him somewhere before," she thought, substituting this thought for the unpleasant sensation his look had given her, refusing to define the feeling which slowly but irresistibly froze her heart. But it grew and rose in her throat, filling her mouth with dry bitterness. She could not resist turning round and looking at him again. He was standing in the same place, shifting from one foot to the other as if trying to make up his mind what to do. He kept his left hand in his pocket, his right was thrust between the buttons of his coat, lifting his right shoulder higher than the left.

She went to a bench and sat down slowly and carefully, as though afraid of wrenching something inside her. Under the stress of her forebodings, she searched her mind and succeeded in recalling the two occasions on which she had seen this man before: once in the open lot at the edge of town when Rybin had made his escape; the second time at the trial. In the courtroom he had stood next to the police officer whom she had sent off in the wrong direction after Rybin. She realized she was being shadowed. There could be no doubt about it.

"Caught?" she asked herself.

"Maybe not yet," she answered with a shudder.

"Caught!" she declared a moment later, forcing herself to face the truth.

She glanced about without seeing anything, while thoughts, like sparks, flashed through her mind.

"Ought I to leave the suitcase and go away?"

This was replaced by a brighter spark.

"What? Abandon the words of my son? Give them over into such hands?"

She clutched the suitcase.

"Ought I to go off with it? Run away?"

Such thoughts were enemies, forced on her from outside. They seared her mind and stitched her heart like fiery threads. The pain of them drove her away from her own self, away from Pavel and all that had become so dear to her. She felt that some hostile force was pressing down on her shoulders and breast, choking her with this deadly fear. The veins at her temples began to throb violently and she felt the warmth creep up to the roots of her hair.

Suddenly, in one supreme effort, she threw off her thoughts, stamped out all these mean, feeble little sparks and said to herself imperiously, "Shame on you!"

She felt better at once—became, in fact, filled with courage, and added, "Don't disgrace your son! You're not afraid!"

Her eyes met a dull, timid gaze. Into her mind flashed the face of Rybin. The few seconds of hesitation had made her more sure. Now her heart was beating calmly.

"What will happen now?" she thought as she glanced about.

The spy called a station guard and whispered something to him, indicating her with his eyes. The guard looked at him and backed away. Another guard came up, listened to what he had to say, and frowned. He was an old man—tall, grey-haired, unshaven. He nodded to the spy and made his way towards the bench on which the mother was sitting. The spy disappeared.

The guard approached unhurriedly, frowning and staring at the mother. She shrank back on the bench.

"If only they don't strike me!" she thought.

He stopped in front of her and said nothing for a minute.

"What are you looking at?" he asked at last.

"Nothing."

"Is that so? You thief, you! Up to such tricks at your age!"

His words struck her in the face—once—twice! Their coarse malice was as painful as if he had ripped open her cheek or gouged out her eyes.

"Me? I'm no thief! You lie!" she cried at the top of her voice, while everything about her tossed in the gale of her indignation. She gave the suitcase a tug, and it came open.

"Look! Look, everybody!" she shouted, jumping up and waving a handful of leaflets above her head. Through the roaring in her ears she could hear the exclamations of the people who came running from all sides.

"What's happened?"

"Over there—a spy. . . ."

"What's that?"

"They say she's a thief."

"Such a respectable-looking woman? Tck, tck!"

"I'm no thief!" cried the mother in a loud voice, her emotions checked by the sight of the people crowding about her.

"Yesterday there was a trial of political prisoners, and my son, Pavel Vlassov, was one of them. He made a speech—here it is! I'm taking it to the people, so that they can read it and know the truth. . . ."

Someone cautiously took one of the leaflets she was holding. She waved them in the air and tossed them into the crowd.

"They'll give it to you for that!" came a frightened voice.

The mother saw them snatch up the leaflets and stuff them inside their coats and into their pockets. This gave her new strength. She began to speak more calmly and forcibly, conscious of the pride and joy surging within her. As she spoke, she snatched leaflets out of her bag and threw them to right and left, into the hands that eagerly caught them.

"Do you know why they brought my son and his friends to court? I'll tell you, and you can believe the heart of a mother, and her grey hairs. They brought them to court for the simple reason that they told people the truth! And yesterday I found out there is no one who can deny this truth—no one!"

The crowd grew and was silent, forming a ring of living bodies about the woman.

"Poverty, hunger and disease—that's what people get for their work! Everything is against us—all of our lives, day after day, we give our last ounce of strength to our work, always dirty, always fooled, while others reap all the joy and benefits, holding us in ignorance like dogs on a chain—we don't know anything; holding us in fear—we're afraid of everything! Our lives are just one long, dark night!"

"That's right," came the dull response.

"Shut her mouth for her!"

At the back of the crowd the mother noticed the spy and two gendarmes, and she hastened to hand out the last leaflets. But when her hand reached into the suitcase, it touched somebody else's hand.

"Take them, take them," she said as she bent over.

"Get away!" shouted the gendarmes, pushing the people aside. The crowd reluctantly gave way, pressing against the gendarmes and holding them back, perhaps without even wanting to. The people were irresistibly drawn to the grey-haired woman with the large candid eyes in a kindly face. Isolated in life, torn away from each other, they now found themselves together here, listening with deep feeling to the flaming words which perhaps many of these hearts, hurt by life's injustice, had long been searching for. Those who were nearest the mother stood silent, their eyes fixed on hers with eager attention, and she could feel their warm breath on her face.

"Move on, old woman!"

"They'll grab you in a minute!"

"What a nerve she has!"

"Get out of here! Go back to your places!" cried the gendarmes, pushing ahead. The people in front of the mother swayed and held on to one another.

She felt that they were ready to understand and to believe her, and she wanted to hurry and tell them all she knew, all the thoughts whose power she had experienced. They rose from the bottom of her heart and formed a song, but she realized with a pang that she could not sing it—her voice was cracked and broken.

"The words of my son are the honest words of a workingman who has not sold his soul. You can tell honest words by their boldness!"

A pair of youthful eyes were fastened on her in fear and ecstasy.

Someone struck her in the breast and she fell down on the bench. The arms of the gendarmes flashed over the heads of the crowd, clutching at collars and shoulders, pushing people aside, snatching off caps and tossing them to the other end of the room. Everything swam before the mother's eyes, but she conquered her weakness to cry out with what was left of her voice, "Band together, good people, into one strong force!"

A gendarme caught her by the collar with a large, beefy hand and shook her.

"Shut your mouth!"

Her head struck against the wall; for a second the acrid smoke of fear rose in her heart, but courage flared up again, driving away the smoke.

"Get along with you!" said the gendarme.

"Don't let anything frighten you! Nothing could be worse than the lives you live!"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

The gendarme took her arm and pushed her. Another gendarme took her other arm and together they led her away.

" . . . than the bitterness that eats at your heart and gnaws at your soul every day!"

The spy ran ahead of her, shaking his fist in her face.

"Shut up, you bitch!" he shouted.

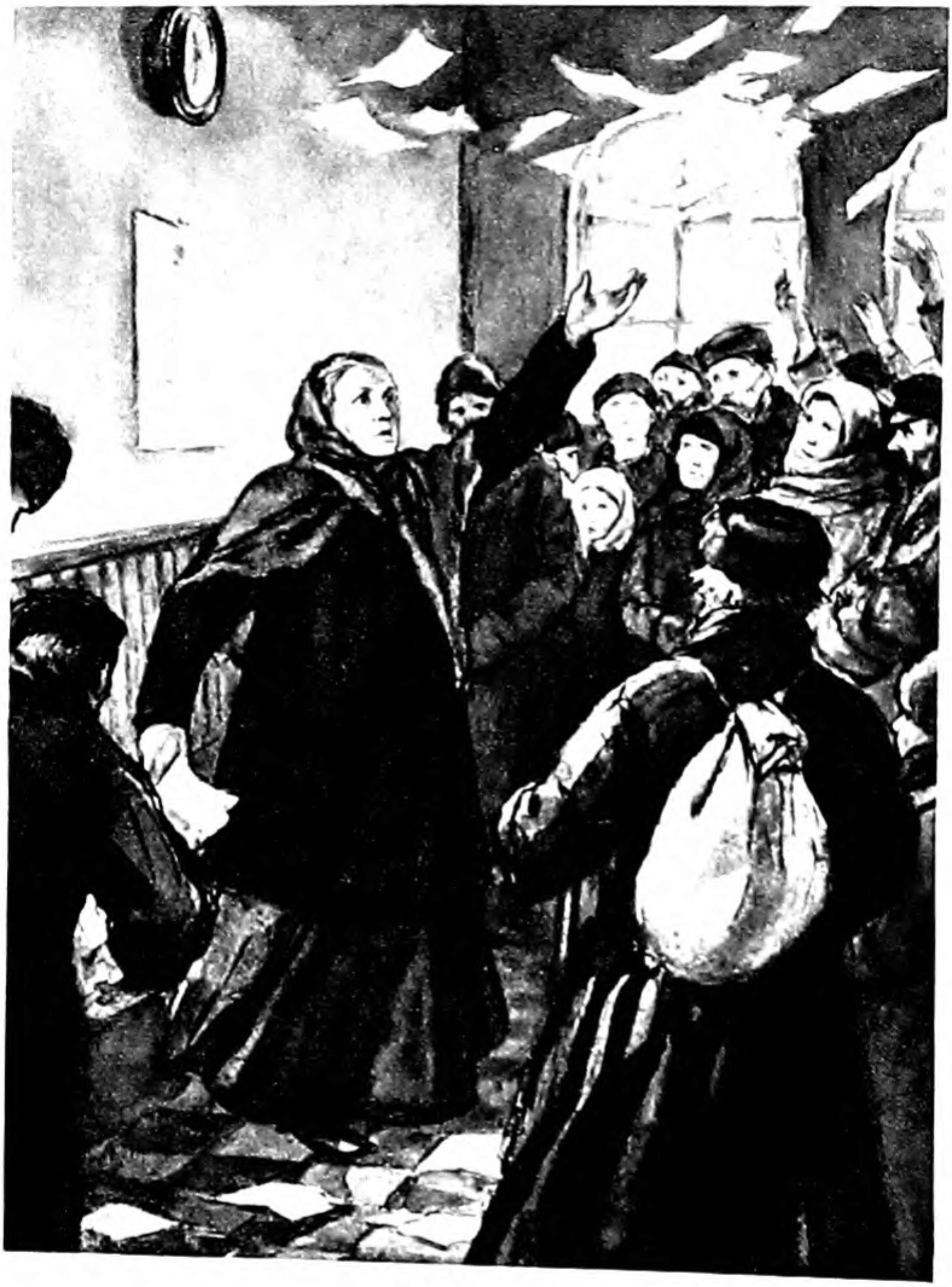
Her eyes flashed and dilated and her lips quivered. "They can't kill my spirit—my living spirit!" she shouted, bracing her feet against the slippery stone floor.

"You bitch!"

The spy struck her in the face.

"Serves her right, the old hag!" came a malicious voice.

For a moment the mother was blinded by something black and red, and the salty taste of blood filled her mouth.



Allama Iqbal Library
531908

531908
14-6-07

She was roused by a rattle of short exclamations:

"Don't dare touch her!"

"Come on, fellows!"

"You scoundrel, you!"

"Let him have it!"

"They can't bloody up our minds!"

They pushed her in the back, in the neck, beat her on shoulders and head; everything flashed and whirled in a tornado of shouts and wails and whistles, something dull and deafening struck her ears, filled her throat, choked her, the floor sank, her knees gave way, she winced under lancet thrusts of pain, her body grew heavy, swayed helplessly. But her eyes did not lose their shine. And they met other eyes, all of them burning with the bright, bold fire she knew and loved so well.

They pushed her through a door.

She snatched free one of her arms and caught hold of the doorjamb.

"Not even an ocean of blood can drown the truth!"

They struck her across the hand.

"You can only make us hate you the more, fools that you are! And it will all fall on your own heads!"

A gendarme seized her by the throat and began to choke her.

"Miserable creatures . . ." she gasped.

Someone answered her with a loud sob.

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.